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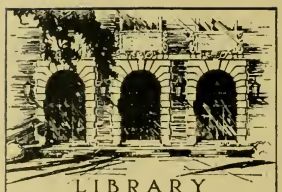

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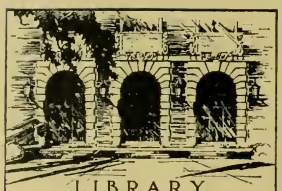

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MR. JERVIS

BY

B. M. CROKER

AUTHOR OF

"PRETTY MISS NEVILLE," "DIANA BARRINGTON," "A BIRD OF PASSAGE,"
"A FAMILY LIKENESS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1894

"Lord of himself, though not of lands;
And having nothing, yet hath all."

SIR H. WOTTON.

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PARCOLAR
NARBERTH

MR. JERVIS.

CHAPTER XVII.

"TAKE A FRIEND'S ADVICE."

SARABELLA-BRANDE was a truly proud woman, as she concluded an inspection of her niece, ere the young lady started to make her first appearance in public. There was not a fault to be found in that fresh white dress, pretty hat, neat gloves, and parasol—except that she would have liked just a *bit* more colour; but what Honor lacked in this respect, her aunt made up generously in her own person, in the shape of a cobalt blue silk, heavily trimmed with gold embroidery, and a vivid blue and yellow bonnet. Two rickshaws were in attendance, a grand new one on indiarubber tires, and four gaudy jampannis, all at

the "Miss Sahib's" service. Mrs. Brande led the way, bowling down the smooth club road at the rate of seven miles an hour, lying back at an angle of forty-five degrees, her bonnet-feathers waving triumphantly over the back of her vehicle. The club was the centre, the very social heart or pulse of Shirani. It contained rooms for reading, writing, dancing, for playing cards or billiards, or for drinking tea.

Outside ran a long verandah, lined with ill-shaped wicker chairs, overlooking the tennis courts and gardens, and commanding a fine view of the snows.

The six tennis courts were full, the band of the Scorpions was playing the last new gavotte, when Mrs. Brande walked up with head in the air, closely followed by her niece and Captain Waring. She felt that every eye, and especially Mrs. Langrishe's eye, was on her, and was fully equal to the occasion. Mrs. Langrishe, faultlessly attired in a French costume, and looking the picture of elegant fastidiousness, mur-

mured to her companion, Sir Gloster Sandilands—

"Not a bad-looking girl, really; not at *all* unpresentable, but sallow," and she smiled with deadly significance, little supposing that her faint praise attracted the baronet to Honor on the spot. Then she rose, and rustled down with much frow-frowing of silken petticoats, and accosted her rival with expressions of hypocritical delight.

"Where *have* you been?" she inquired. "We thought you were in quarantine; but when I look at you, I need not ask how you are? Pray introduce your niece to me. I hope she and Lalla will be immense allies." As she spoke, she was closely scrutinizing every item of Honor's appearance, and experiencing an unexpected pang.

The girl was a lady, she had a graceful figure, and a bright clever face; and the old woman had not been suffered to dress her! Even her captious eye could find no fault in that simple toilet.

"How do you do, Miss Gordon? Had you a good passage out?" she asked urbanely.

"Yes, thank you."

"You came out in the *Arcadia*, and most likely with a number of people I know, the Greys, the Bruces, the Lockyers."

"No doubt I did. There were three hundred passengers."

"And no doubt you had a very good time, and enjoyed yourself immensely."

"No, I cannot fancy any one enjoying themselves on board ship," rejoined Honor, with a vivid recollection of fretful children to wash and dress, and keep out of harm's way.

"Oh!" with a pitying, half-contemptuous smile, "seasick the whole way?"

Honor shook her head.

"Well, I see you won't commit yourself," with a playful air, "but I shall hear all about you from the Greys," and she nodded significantly, as much as to say, "Pray do not imagine that any of your enormities will be hidden from *me!*"

"Lalla!" to her niece, who was the centre of a group of men, "come here, and be introduced to Miss Gordon."

Lalla reluctantly strolled forward, with the air of a social martyr.

"I think we have met before," said Honor, frankly extending her hand.

Miss Paske stared with a sort of blank expression, and elevating her eyebrows drawled—

"I think not." But she also made a quick little sign.

Unfortunately for her, she had to deal with a girl who could not read such signals, who answered in a clear, far-carrying voice—

"Oh, don't you remember? I met you the other morning before breakfast up among the pine woods; you walking with Mr. Joy—surely you recollect how desperately our dogs fought!"

Lalla felt furious with this blundering idiot, and hated her bitterly from that day forth.

Mrs. Langrishe was made aware of Lalla's

early promenades for the first time, and her lips tightened ominously. She did not approve of these morning *tête-à-têtes* with an impecunious feather-head, like Toby Joy.

"Ah, yes, now that you mention it I *do* recollect," responded Miss Paske, with an air which implied that the fact of the meeting required a most exhaustive mental effort. "But you were in *deshabille*, you see" (this was a malicious and mendacious remark), "and you look so very different when you are dressed up! How do you think you will like India?"

"It is too soon to know as yet."

"I see you have the bump of caution," with a little sneer; "now I make up my mind to like or dislike a place or a person on the spot. I suppose you are fond of riding?"

"I have never ridden since I was a child, but I hope to learn."

"Then that mount on Captain Waring's pony was your first attempt. How ridicu-

lous you did look! I'm afraid you are rather too old to learn riding now. Can you dance?"

"Yes, I am very fond of dancing."

"How many ball dresses did you bring out?" demanded Miss Paske.

"Only three," replied the other, apologetically.

"Oh, they will be ample. India is not what it was. Girls sit out half the night. Don't let your aunt choose your frocks for you, my dear—indeed, we will all present you with a vote of thanks if you will choose *hers*. I've such a painful sense of colour, that a crude combination always hurts me. Just look at that chuprassi, in bright scarlet, standing against a blazing magenta background — of Bourgainvillia— the contrast is an outrage. I must really ask some one to get the man to move on. Here comes Sir Gloster. We will go and appeal to him together," and she walked off.

"I suppose that is the latest arrival?" said Sir Gloster, a big heavy-looking young

man, who wore loose-fitting clothes, a shabby soft felt hat, and rolled as he walked.

"Yes—that is Miss Gordon, Mrs. Brande's niece. She has half a dozen, and wrote home for one, and they say she asked for the best looking; and people here, who have nick-names for every one, call her 'the sample.'"

"Excellent!" ejaculated Sir Gloster, "and a first-class sample. She might tell them to furnish a few more on the same pattern."

"I expect we shall find *one* quite enough for the present," rejoined Miss Paske rather dryly.

"Have all the people nicknames?"

"Most of them; those who are in any way remarkable," she answered, as they paced up and down. "That red-faced man over there is called 'Sherry,' and his wife—I don't see her—'Bitters.' Captain Waring, who is abnormally rich, is called 'the millionaire;' his cousin, the fair young

man in flannels, who keeps rather in the background, is 'the poor relation;' Miss Clegg is known as 'the dâk bungalow fowl,' because she is so bony, and the four Miss Abrahams, who always sit in a row, and are, as you notice, a little dark, are 'the snowy range.'"

"Excellent!" ejaculated Sir Gloster.

"That man that you see drinking coffee," pursued the sprightly damsel, "with the great flat mahogany face, is 'the Europe Ham'—is it not a lovely name? Those two Miss Valpys, the girls with the short hair and immense expanse of shirt fronts, are called 'the lads;' that red-headed youth is known as 'the pink un,' and the two Mrs. Robinsons are respectively, 'good Mrs. Robinson' and 'pretty Mrs. Robinson.'"

"Excellent!" repeated the baronet once more. "And no doubt you and I—at any rate I—have been fitted with a new name, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh no," shaking her head. "Besides,"

with a sweetly flattering smile, "there is nothing to ridicule about you."

She was certainly not going to tell him that he was called "Double Gloster," in reference to his size.

Sir Gloster Sandilands was about thirty years of age, rustic in his ideas, simple in his tastes, narrow in his views. He was the only son of his mother, a widow, who kept him in strict order. He was fond of ladies' society, and of music; and, being rather dull and heavy, greatly appreciated a pretty, lively, and amusing companion. Companions of this description were not unknown to him at home, but as they were generally as penniless as they were charming, the dowager Lady Sandilands kept them and their fascinations at an impracticable distance. She trusted to his sister, Mrs. Kane, to look strictly after her treasure whilst under her roof; but Mrs. Kane was a great deal too much occupied with her own affairs to have any time to bestow on her big brother, who surely was

old enough to take care of himself! He was enchanted with India; and the change from a small county club and confined local surroundings, the worries of a landlord and magistrate, to this exquisite climate and scenery, and free, novel, roving life was delightful. He had spent the cold weather in the plains, and had come up to Shirani to visit his sister, as well as to taste the pleasures of an Indian hill station.

Meanwhile Mrs. Brande had introduced her niece to a number of people; and, seeing her carried off by young Jervis, to look on at the tennis, had sunk into a low chair and abandoned herself to a discussion with another matron.

From this she was ruthlessly disturbed by Mrs. Langrishe.

"Excuse me, dear, but you are sitting on the *World*."

"Oh no, indeed, I'm sure I am not," protested the lady promptly, being reluctant to heave herself out of her comfortable seat.

"Well, please to look," rather sharply.

"There!" impatiently, "you see it is not here. I don't know why you should think that *I* was sitting on it."

"I suppose," with a disagreeable smile, "I naturally suspected *you*, because you sit on every one!" And then she moved off, leaving her opponent gasping.

"I never knew such an odious woman," she cried, almost in tears. "She hustles me about and snaps at me, and yet she will have the face to write down and borrow all my plated side-dishes and ice machine the first time she has a dinner, but that is not *often*, thank goodness."

In the meanwhile Honor had been leaning over a rustic railing watching a tennis match in which her uncle was playing. He was an enthusiast, played well, and looked amazingly young and active.

"So you have been making friends, I see," observed Jervis.

"I don't know about friends," she repeated doubtfully, thinking of Lalla.

"But I've been introduced to several people."

"That verandah is an awful place. Waring has extraordinary nerve to sit there among all those strangers. I am much too shy to venture within a mile of it."

"I believe he is quite at home, and has met no end of acquaintances. Have you paid any visits yet?"

"No; only one or two that he dragged me out to. I'm not a society man."

"And how will you put in your time?"

"I'm fond of rackets and tennis. Your uncle has given me a general invitation to his courts. Do you think we could get up a game to-morrow—your uncle and I, and you and Miss Paske — or Mrs. Sladen?"

"Yes; if we could get Mrs. Sladen."

"Not Miss Paske? Don't you like her?" with a twinkle in his eye.

"It is too soon to say whether I like her or not; but she did not think it too soon to ridicule my aunt to me."

"Well, Miss Gordon, I'll tell you something. I don't care about Miss Paske."

"Why?" she asked quickly.

"Because she snubs me so ferociously. It was the same in Calcutta. By the way, how delighted she was just now, when you, with an air most childlike and bland, informed her aunt and most of Shirani of her pleasant little expeditions with young Joy."

"*Ought* I not to have said anything?" inquired Honor, turning a pair of tragic eyes upon him. "Oh, that is so like me, always blundering into mistakes. But I never dreamt that I was—was——"

"Letting cats out of bags, eh?" he supplemented quietly.

"No, indeed; and it seemed so odd that she did not remember meeting me only three days ago."

"You were thoroughly determined that she should not forget it, and we will see if she ever forgives you. Here comes old Sladen," as a heavy figure loomed in view,

crunching down the gravel, and leaning on the railings in a manner that tested them severely, he looked down upon the gay groups, and six tennis courts, in full swing. Colonel Sladen had an idea that blunt rudeness, administered in a fatherly manner, was pleasing to young women of Miss Gordon's age, and he said—

"So I hear you came up with the great catch of the season. Ha, ha, ha! And got the start of all the girls in the place, eh?"

"Great catch?" she repeated, with her delicate nose high in the air.

"Well, don't look as if you were going to shoot me! I mean the millionaire—that fellow Waring. He seems to be rolling in coin now, but I used to know him long ago when he had not a stiver. He used to gamble—— "

"This is his cousin, Mr. Jervis," broke in Honor, precipitately.

"Oh, indeed," casting an indifferent glance at Jervis. "Well, it's not a bad thing to be cousin to a millionaire."

"How do you know that he is a millionaire?" inquired the young man coolly.

"Oh, I put it to him, and he did not deny the soft impeachment. He has just paid a top price for a couple of weight-carrying polo ponies—I expect old Byng stuck it on."

"The fact of buying polo ponies goes for nothing. If that were a test, you might call nearly every subaltern in India a millionaire," rejoined Jervis with a smile.

Colonel Sladen merely stared at the speaker with an air of solemn contempt, threw the stump of his cheroot into a bush of heliotrope, and, turning once more to Honor, said—

"You see all our smartest young men down there, Miss Gordon—at your feet in one sense, and they will be there in another, before long. I can tell you all about them—it's a good thing for a strange young lady to know how the land lies, and get the straight tip, and know what are trumps."

"What do you mean?" asked Honor, frigidly.

"Oh, come now," with an odious chuckle, "you know what I mean. I want to point you out some of the people, and, as I am the oldest resident, you could not be in better hands. There's Captain Billings of the Bays, the fellow with the yellow cap, playing with Miss Clover, the prettiest girl here——"

He paused, to see if the shot told, or if the statement would be challenged; but no.

"That is Toby Joy, who acts and dances and ought to be in a music-hall, instead of in the service. There is Jenkins of the Crashers, the thin man with a red belt; very rich. His father made the money in pigs or pills—not what you'd call aristocratic, but he is well gilded. Then there is Alston of the Gray Rifles—good-looking chap, eldest son; and Howard of the Queen's Palfreys—old family, heaps of tin; but he drinks. Now, which of these

young men are you going to set your cap at?"

"None of them," she answered with pale dignity.

"Oh, come! I'll lay you five to one you are married by this time next year."

"No—not by this time five years."

"Nonsense! Then what did you come out for, my dear young lady? You won't throw dust in the eyes of an old 'Qui hye' like me, who has seen hundreds of new spins in his day? I suppose you think you have come out to be a comfort to your aunt and uncle? Not a bit of it! You have come out to be a comfort to some young man. Take a friend's advice," lowering his voice to a more confidential key, "and keep your eye steadily on the millionaire."

"Colonel Sladen," her lips trembling with passion, her eyes blazing with wrath, "I suppose you are joking, and think all this very funny. It does not amuse me in the least; on the contrary, I—I think it is a pitiable thing to find a man of your age

so wanting in good taste, and talking such vulgar nonsense!"

"Do you really?" in a bantering tone, and not a wit abashed — in fact, rather pleased than otherwise. "*No* sense of respect for your elders! Ho, ho, ho! No sense of humour, eh? Why, I believe you are a regular young fire-ship! We shall be having the whole place in a blaze—a fire-Brande, that's a joke, eh?—not bad. I see Tombs beckoning; he has got up a rubber at last, thank goodness! Sorry to tear myself away. Think over my advice. Au revoir," and he departed, chuckling.

"Did you ever know such a detestable man?" she exclaimed, turning to Jervis with tears of anger glittering in her eyes.

"Well, once or twice it *did* occur to me to heave him over the palings—if I was able."

Honor burst into an involuntary laugh, as she thought of their comparative weight.

"He did it on purpose to draw you, and he has riled you properly."

"To think of his being the husband of such a woman as Mrs. Sladen! Oh, I detest him! Imagine his having the insolence to make out that every girl who comes to India is nothing but a scheming, mercenary, fortune-hunter! I am glad he pointed out all the rich men!"

"May I ask why?" inquired her somewhat startled companion.

"Because, of course, I shall take the greatest possible care never to know one of them."

"So poverty, for once, will have its innings? You will not taboo the younger sons?"

"No; only good matches and great catches," with vicious emphasis. "Hateful expressions! Mr. Jervis, I give you fair warning that, if you were rich, I would never speak to you again. You are laughing!"

He certainly *was* laughing. As he leant his head down on his arms, his shoulders shook unmistakably.

"Perhaps," in an icy tone, "when your amusement has subsided, you will be good enough to take me back to my aunt!"

"Oh, Miss Gordon!" suddenly straightening himself, and confronting her with a pair of suspiciously moist eyes, "I must have seemed extremely rude, and I humbly beg your pardon. I was laughing at—at my own thoughts, and your wrathful indignation was such that—that——"

"You had better not say any more," she interrupted; "you will only make matters worse." Then added with a dawning smile, "It is what I always do myself. I speak from experience."

"Promise me one thing," he urged—"that you will not drop *me* when you are weeding out your acquaintance."

"Pray, why should I drop you? My new rule does not apply to you. Are *you* a millionaire?" And she broke into a laugh.

A keener observer than the young lady would have noticed a shade of embarrass-

ment in his glance as, after a moment's hesitation, he said—

"I am quite an old Indian friend now, at any rate — almost your first acquaintance."

"Yes, I admit all that; but you must not presume on our ancient friendship. I warn you solemnly that the next time you laugh at me—laugh until you actually *cry* —our relations will be—strained."

* * * * *

It was becoming dark, the fires were visibly increasing on the distant hills, the first mess bugle had gone. There was a general getting into rickshaws, and calling for ponies, and presently the club was empty, the formidable verandahs deserted, and all the red-capped little tennis-boys went trooping home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TABLE OF PRECEDENCE.

Time wore on; Honor was becoming familiarized with her new surroundings, had picked up some useful Hindustani words, made a round of calls, and shown that she had no mean skill at tennis. And Mrs. Brande had demonstrated that she was not a woman of words only. She had given young Jervis a general and urgent invitation to her house — moreover, he found favour in her husband's eyes. He was a fine, well-set-up, gentlemanly young fellow, a keen tennis player, with no haw-haw humbug about him, therefore the Honourable Pelham heartily endorsed his wife's hospitality.

As for Captain Waring, alas! the three days' travelling intimacy — like steamer friendships — had flickered, and flickered, and sunk down, and died. Mrs. Brande's state-dinners were unimpeachable, but desperately dull; and she was not in the "smart" set; her niece was far too downright and raw; her sincere grey eyes had a way of looking at him that made him feel uncomfortable — a *blasé*, world-battered, selfish mortal. She had a sharp tongue, too, and no fortune; therefore he went over to the enemy's camp, and followed the standard of Mrs. Langrishe.

* * * * *

The first grand entertainment at which Honor had appeared was a large, solemn dinner-party, given by the chief medical officer in Shirani. There were to be thirty guests. This much Mrs. Brande's cook had gleaned from Mrs. Loyd's khansamah when he came to borrow jelly-tins and ice-spoons. Mrs. Brande delighted in these

formal dinners, where she could enjoy herself most thoroughly as chief guest and experienced critic; and she looked forward to this feast with what seemed to her niece an almost infantile degree of glee and happy anticipation.

Mr. Brande was absent, but even had he been at home he was never enthusiastic respecting these functions. His wife had complained to Mrs. Sladen, "that he got into his evening clothes and bad humour at one and the same time," save when he dined at home.

"You will wear your white silk, Honor," observed her aunt, "and I my new pink brocade, with the white lace. I'm really curious to see what sort of a turn-out Mrs. Loyd will have. She has the Blacks' old cook, and they never gave a decent dinner; but then Mrs. Black was stingy — she grudged a glass of wine for sauce, and never allowed more than half an anna a head for soup-meat. Now Mrs. Loyd is getting up fish from Bombay, so I fancy

she means to do the thing properly. Have you ever been to a dinner-party, child?"

"No; not what *you* would call a party—six at the most; but I have come in after dinner."

"Fie! fie! that is poor fun," cried Mrs. Brande, with great scorn. "I should just like to see any one asking *my* niece to come after dinner! I wonder who will take you in? I know most of the people who are going, for I always read their names in the peon's book when I get invitations. There will be Captain Waring, and young Jervis, and Sir Gloster Sandilands. I hope Captain Waring will take you in."

"Oh, I hope not, aunt; he and I do not suit one another at all."

"Why not?" rather sharply.

"I've not sufficient 'go' in me. I can't talk about the people he knows. I'm not smart, or up to date. I can't say amusing things like Miss Paske; I am merely a stupid little country mouse!"

"And she is a little cat!" with a quick

nod. "Well, I must say I'd fifty times rather have Jervis myself. He has such nice manners—different to other young men, who come to my house, and eat and drink of the best, and scarcely look at me afterwards. There was that Thorpe; he never even got off his chair when I spoke to him at the club. I know I'm not a lady born—my father was a wheelwright—but he and his had been in the same place three hundred years. Still, I have my feelings, and that Thorpe, though he may be a lord's son, is no gentleman. He thought I was deaf, and I heard him say to a man, when I was on his arm—

"'I'm going to supper the old girl.'

"'Not *this* old girl, thank you, sir,' said I, and I drew back and went and sat down again. 'Ow he does 'ate me, to be sure. Well, Honor, I wish you a pleasant partner, for these dinners are long affairs."

"Are they indeed, aunt? I am sorry to hear it."

"If they bring the *entrées* in after the

joint, which is new-fashioned and leading to mistakes, we are stuck for two mortal hours. These native servants are the ten plagues of Egypt. Once—oh lor! I shall never forget the lady's face—I saw a man handing round mashed potatoes as an *entrée*—all alone! Once I saw a wretch offering mustard in a breakfast-cup, and the mistress having splendid silver cruet-stands. Of course he had some spite against her. It's on *these* occasions they pay you out, when they know you are tied hand and foot. As for myself, I am all right, being senior lady—the doctor takes *me*. Mrs. Langrishe for once will be nowhere, for the Loyds (she being a commissioner's daughter) know what's what. They have the rules of precedence at their fingers' ends, but anyway I can always lend them this," and she took up a book bound in blue paper, and began to read aloud—

"'All wives take place according to the rank assigned to their respective husbands.' Do they indeed!" she snorted. "I'd

like to know how many times Mrs. Langrishe has walked through *that* rule? Now my husband, being a member of council, comes next to a bishop. Do you see, Honor?"

"Yes, Aunt Sara."

"Whilst Mrs. Langrishe ranks below political agents of twelve years' standing. And I'm not at *all* sure that she ought to go in before the educational department, second class."

"No, aunt," replied Honor, endeavouring to look wise, and marvelling much at Mrs. Brande's enthusiasm. Her colour had risen, her eyes shone, as she energetically brandished the pamphlet in her hand.

The great day arrived at last. People in Shirani did not give long invitations, and Mrs. Brande, in her new pink brocade, wearing all her diamonds, and a cap with three lofty pink plumes, departed in good time along with her niece, who wore her new white silk, and brought her violin—by special request.

Mrs. Loyd received them with effusion, the room was half full of the *élite* of Shirani wearing their best clothes, and their blandest official manners. Honor noticed Major and Mrs. Langrishe, Sir Gloster Sandilands, Captain Waring, Mr. Jervis, Captain Noble, the Padre and his wife, the Cantonement Magistrate and his wife, the Colonel commanding the Scorpions, and many others. It was a most solemn official party. Presently the dining-room door was flung wide, and a magnificent servant salaamed and said—

"Khana, mez pur;" *i.e.* "dinner is served."

Mrs. Brande half rose from her seat, and smiled encouragingly at her host.

But—what was this? He was offering his arm to an insignificant little person in black, who was barely thirty years of age, and a complete stranger! Mrs. Brande, as she subsequently expressed it, "turned goose-flesh all over."

What an affront, before the whole station,

or at least the best part of it; and there was Mrs. Langrishe looking at her with, oh! such an *odious* smile. Well, at any rate she would not give her the satisfaction of seeing her break down or fly out. That smile was a stimulant, and rising, after some moments' distinctly perceptible hesitation—during which the spectators almost held their breath—she accepted the escort of the gentleman who had humbly bowed himself before her, and with a dangerous-looking toss of her plumes, surged slowly into the dining-room.

She was conducted to a conspicuous place; but what of that? Nothing—no, not even a gilded chair, with a coronet on the back, would now appease or please her. Declining soup with a haughty gesture, she leant back and gazed about her scornfully. Yes, there was a distinct smell of Kerosine oil—one of the Khitmatghars wore a dirty coat; that was Mrs. Sladen's claret jug, and most of the forks were borrowed. As for the dinner, she sent away dish after

dish with ill-concealed contempt, slightly varying the monotony of this proceeding by leaving conspicuous helpings untasted on her plate—knowing well, that such behaviour is pain and grief to a hostess. Even the host noticed her scanty appetite, and remarked in his loud cheery voice—

"Why, Mrs. Brande, you are eating nothing."

"Indeed," she leant forward and called out, "I'm so *far* from you, I wonder you can notice it;" adding to this extremely ungracious reply, "I've no appetite *this* evening," and she flung herself once more back in her chair, and waved her fan to and fro, passionately—not to say furiously.

There, to aggravate her still further, was that Lalla Paske opposite, sitting between Sir Gloster and Captain Waring, and ogling and carrying on. Little reptile! she would like to throw a plate at her. Honor was on Sir Gloster's other hand, looking, as her aunt mentally noted, very "distangay" and animated. The baronet seemed to be

greatly struck, and talked away incessantly; and this was the one miserable crumb of comfort on which the poor lady dined!

Honor was not too engrossed with her own affairs ~~not~~ to notice that her aunt appeared most dreadfully put out about something, and was looking exceedingly flushed and angry.

In fact, Miss Paske—good-natured, kind little soul—leant over, and said to her, "Have you noticed Mrs. Brande? Does she not look extraordinary? Her face is so red, and swelled up, I really believe she is going to have a fit of some sort! She is neither eating nor speaking."

However, during dessert Mrs. Brande found her tongue. There was a general discussion on the subject of Christian names, and some one said that "Honor was a nice old-fashioned one."

"Oh," cried Lalla, "I think it hideous! You don't mind, do you, Miss Gordon? How angry I should have been if my godfathers and godmothers had given it to

me! It has such an abrupt sound, and is so *very* goody-goody."

Mrs. Brande, who had hitherto refused to talk to her neighbour, even in the most ordinary way, to discuss the weather, the great diamond case, or the state of the rupee, now suddenly burst out—

"Anyway, it has a decent meaning; and if it is goody-goody, yours is *not*. I believe there was once a Miss Rooke, who had the same name, and was fond of play-acting and singing, and by all accounts *no* great shakes."

In just alarm, Mrs. Loyd made a hasty signal, and the ladies arose as if worked by one spring, and departed into the drawing-room in a body. Mrs. Brande immediately seated herself in a large armchair, where she sat aloof and alone, looking stern and unapproachable, as she slowly turned over an album of photographs. The book was upside down, but this was evidently immaterial.

Vainly did Mrs. Loyd come and stand

before her, and abase herself; vainly did she endeavour to propitiate her. Poor deluded little woman!—it was mere waste of time and breath to praise Mrs. Brande's dress, Mrs. Brande's niece, or even to beg for a recipe for chutney.

"I can give you a recipe for *manners*," observed the outraged matron, in an awful tone; "I will send you the table of precedence, and I will *write* to you to-morrow."

On hearing this terrible threat, Mrs. Loyd's blood ran cold,—for she was a woman of peace,—and at this juncture the men appeared slouching in by twos and threes—as is their wont. They discovered the ladies scattered in couples about the room, all save one, who sat in solitary majesty.

Captain Waring sauntered over to Lalla, and remarked, as he glanced significantly at Mrs. Brande, who was motionless as a cloud on a hot summer's day—a cloud charged with electricity, "When I look

round I am inclined to say with the kind-hearted child, when he was shown Doré's picture, 'There is one poor lion who has got no Christian!'"

"She is by no means so badly off as you imagine," rejoined Lalla with a demure face. "She has nearly eaten the hostess—does she not look ferocious? Whom shall we throw to her for a fresh victim? She is frightfully angry because she was not taken in to dinner first. Poor creature, she has so very little dignity, that she is always taking the greatest care of it. Hurrah! Hurrah! She is actually going. Oh, I am enormously amused."

Yes, Mrs. Brande had already risen to depart. If not taken in first, she was firmly resolved to take this matter into her own hands, and to be the first to leave.

It was in vain that meek Mrs. Loyd pleaded that it was only half-past nine, that every one was looking forward to hearing Miss Gordon play, that she had promised to bring her violin.

"Surely, Mrs. Brande, you will not be so cruel as to take her away and disappoint the whole company!" urged Mrs. Loyd pathetically. "I am told that her violin-playing is marvellous."

"The company have seen Miss Gordon's aunt playing *second fiddle* all the evening, and *that* must content them for the present," retorted Mrs. Brande, who was already in the verandah, robed in a superb long cloak, the very fur of which seemed to catch something of its owner's spirit, and to bristle up about her ears, as with a sweeping inclination, and beckoning to Honor to follow her, she swept down the steps.

All the way home, and as they rolled along side by side, Mrs. Brande gave vent to her wrath, and allowed her injured feelings fair play. "Precedence" was her hobby, her one strong point. A woman might rob her, slander her, even strike her, sooner than walk out of a room before her. She assured her awestruck niece that she would write to "P." before she slept that night, and

unless she received an ample apology, the matter should *go up to the Viceroy!* What was the use of people getting on in the service, and earning rewards by years of hard work in bad climates and deadly jungles, if any one who liked might kick them down the ladder, as *she* had been kicked that evening!

"What," she angrily continued, with voice pitched half an octave higher, "was the value of these appointments, or was it child's play, and a new game? It would be a dear game to some people!"

She arrived at this conclusion and her own door simultaneously, and flinging off her wrap, and snatching a lamp from a terrified khitmatghar (who saw that the Mem Sahib was "Bahout Kuffa"), she hurried into her husband's sanctum, and returned with a book.

"What was that person's name, Honor?" she inquired; "did you happen to hear it? —the woman who was taken in first?"

"Mrs. Ringrose, I believe."

"Ringrose, Ringrose," hunting through the leaves with feverish haste. "Ye-es, here it is."

"James — Walter — Ringrose — he is a member of council in Calcutta, and just *one* week senior to P.!" and she gazed at her niece with a face almost devoid of colour, and the expression of a naughty child who is desperately ashamed of herself. "So I've been in a tantrum, and missed my dinner and a pleasant evening, all for nothing! Well, to be sure, I've been a fine old fool," throwing the book on the table. "But what brings Calcutta people up here?" she demanded pettishly.

"I think she is sister to some one in Shirani, and her husband has gone on to the snows, and left her here. Dear Aunt Sara," continued Honor playfully, "why do you trouble your head about precedence? How can it matter how you go in to a meal, or where you sit?"

"My dear child, it's in my very blood. I can't help it; it is meat and drink to me;

it is what a lover is to a girl, a coronet to a duchess, a medal to a soldier—it's the outward and visible sign of P.'s deserts—and mine. And the sight of another woman sitting in my lawful place just chokes me. 'A woman takes rank according to her husband,' that seemed to be ringing in my ears all the evening. How was I to know her husband was in council too? However, I went in to dinner, that's one comfort." (It had not been much comfort to her cavalier). "At first I was in two minds to go straight home. I remember hearing of three ladies at a party, who each expected to go in with the host, and when he took one, the others got up and walked off supperless."

"I think they were extremely foolish—they ought to have taken each other in arm-in-arm; it's what I should have done," said Honor emphatically.

"Yes, young people don't care; but I can no more change than a leopard his skin, and a nigger his spots—well, you

know what I mean. I am not always such a stickler, though—for instance, this very winter, when I happened to go into the ladies' club at Alijore, and no one stood up to receive me, I took no notice, though I was so *hurt* that I scarcely closed an eye that night. Kiss me, dearie, and forgive me, as one of the party, for breaking up so early, and spoiling every one's pleasure" (a supreme flight of imagination). "Maybe some day you will be touchy too."

"Perhaps I may, but not about rank and precedence. Surely there is no precedence in heaven."

"I'm not so certain of that," rejoined Mrs. Brande; "an archangel is above an angel. However, I may leave my proud thoughts behind, for I shall have a lowly place—if I ever get there at all. Now, dear, I'm just starving; a morsel of fish and a spoonful of aspic was all I had. So call Bahadar Ali to get me some cold turkey and ham, and a glass of claret. Maybe you would take a pick too?"

"No indeed, thank you. I had a capital dinner."

"And you found your partner pleasant? —a rising young civilian. I nursed him through typhoid, and I know him well. He draws twelve hundred a month. If you married him you would take the *pas* of Mrs. Langrishe."

"Dear Auntie," bursting out into a peal of laughter, "how funny you are! I am not going to marry any one; you must deliver me at home a single young woman."

"What nonsense! However," as if struck by a happy thought, "you might be engaged and still single; I saw you talking to Sir Gloster——"

"Yes, he is rather agreeable—he was telling me about his tour among the old cities of the Deccan. And——"

"And I noticed Miss Lalla trying to put in *her* spoon. What a pushing little monkey she is—her aunt's very double!"

* * * * *

To show her penitence, instead of the

letter she had threatened—which lay like a nightmare on poor Mrs. Loyd—Mrs. Brande sent restitution the next day in the form of a dozen pine-apples and a basket of fresh eggs. They were gladly accepted as peace-offerings, and Mrs. Loyd heard no more about "the table of precedence."

CHAPTER XIX.

LET US TELL THE TRUTH.

A MONTH had elapsed, and Shirani was as full and as gay as Miss Paske had predicted—there were dinners, dances, balls, theatricals, and picnics.

Visitors had shaken down into sets, and discovered whom they liked and whom they did not like. In a short hill season there is no time to waste on long-drawn-out overtures to acquaintance; besides, in India, society changes so rapidly, and has so many mutual friends—the result of so many different moves—that people know each other as intimately in six months as they would in six years in England. There were "sets" in Shirani, though not aggressively defined: the acting and musical set, which

numbered as stars Miss Paske and Mr. Joy; also Captain Dashwood, of the Dappled Hussars; Mrs. Rolland, who had once been a matchless actress, but was now both deaf and quarrelsome; and many other lesser lights.

Then there was the "smart" set, headed by Mrs. Langrishe, who wore dresses more suitable to Ascot than the Hymalayas; drank tea with each other, dined with each other—talked peerage, and discussed London gossip; looked down on many of their neighbours, and spoke of them as being "scarcely human," and were altogether quite painfully exclusive.

There was the "fast" set—men who played high at the club, betted on races in England (per wire); enjoyed big nights and bear fights, and occasionally went down without settling their club account!

And even Mrs. Brande had a set—yes, positively her own little circle for the first time in her life—and was a proud and happy woman.

"It made a wonderful difference having a girl in the house," she remarked at least twice a day to "P.," and "P.," strange to say, received the well-worn observation without a sarcastic rejoinder.

Certainly Honor had made a change at Rookwood. She had prevailed on her aunt to allow her to cover the green rep drawing-room suite with pretty cretonne, to banish the round table with its circle of books dealt out like a pack of cards, to arrange flowers and grasses in profusion, and to have tea in the verandah. Honor played tennis capitally, and her uncle, instead of going to the club, inaugurated sets at home, and these afternoons began to have quite a reputation. There were good courts, good players—excellent refreshments. Mrs. Brande's strawberries and rich yellow cream were renowned; and people were eager for standing invitations to Rookwood "Tuesdays" and "Saturdays." Besides Mr. Brande and his niece—hosts in themselves—there

were Sir Gloster, Mrs. Sladen, the Padré and his wife, and young Jervis, who were regular *habitués*. There were tournaments and prizes, and a briskness and "go" about these functions that made them the most popular entertainments in Shirani, and folk condescended to fish industriously for what they would once have scorned, viz. :— "invitations to Mother Brande's afternoons."

Captain Waring was tired of Shirani, though he had met many pals—played polo three times a week, and whist six times, until the small hours. Although invited out twice as much as any other bachelor, and twice as popular as his cousin, indeed he and his cousin—as he remarked with a roar of laughter—"were not in the same set."

(Nor, for that matter, were Mrs. Langrishe and her niece in the same set; for Lalla was "theatrical" and her aunt was "smart.")

Captain Waring and his companion lived

together in Haddon Hall, with its world-wide reputation for smoking chimneys; but although they resided under the same roof, they saw but little of one another. Waring had the best rooms, an imposing staff of crest-emblazoned servants. Jervis lived in two small apartments, and the chief of his retinue was a respectable grey-bearded bearer, Jan Mahomed by name, who looked cheap. Jervis spent most of his time taking long walks or rides—shooting or sketching with some young fellows in the Scorpions—or up at Rookwood, where he dined at least thrice a week and spent all his Sundays, and where he had been warmly received by Ben, and adopted into the family as his "uncle"! No words, however many and eloquent, could more strongly indicate how highly he stood in Mr. and Mrs. Brande's good graces. To be Ben's "uncle" almost implied that they looked upon him as an adopted son.

Frequently days elapsed, and Clarence and his companion scarcely saw one another,

save at polo. Mark kept early hours and was up betimes—indeed, occasionally he was up and dressed ere his cousin had gone to bed.

One afternoon, however, he found him evidently awaiting his arrival, sitting in the verandah, and not as usual at the club card-table.

"Hullo, Mark! what a gay young bird you are, always going out, always on the wing—never at home!"

"The same to you," said the other cheerily.

"Well, I just wanted to see you and catch you for a few minutes, old chap. I'm getting beastly sick of this place—we have been here nearly six weeks—I vote, as the policeman says, we 'move on.'"

"Move where?" was the laconic inquiry.

"To Simla, to be sure! the club here is just a mere rowdy pot-house. I never saw such rotten polo! My best pony is lame—gone in the shoulder. I believe that little beggar Byng stuck me; and besides this,

Miss Potter—the girl with the black eyes and twelve hundred a year—is going away."

"To Simla?" expressively.

"Yes. She does not want to move, but the people she is with, the Athertons, are off, and of course she is bound to go with them. That girl likes me—she believes in me."

"Do you think she believes that you are what they call you here, a millionaire?"

"What a grossly coarse way of putting it! Well, I should not be surprised if she did!"

"Then if that is the case, don't you think the sooner you undeceive her the better!"

"Excellent high-minded youth! But why?"

"Because it strikes me that we have played this little game long enough."

"And you languish for the good old board ship and Poonah days over again! Shall we publish who is really who, in the

papers, and send a little 'para' to the *Pioneer?*" with angry sarcasm.

"No; but don't you see that when I took what you called a 'back seat,' I never supposed it would develop into a regular sort of society fraud, or lead us on to such an extent. I'm always on the point of blurting out something about money, and pulling myself up. If I speak the truth people will swear I am lying. I don't mind their thinking me an insignificant, idle young ass; but when they talk before me of dire poverty, and then pause apologetically—when they positively refrain from asking me to subscribe to entertainments or charities—I tell you I don't *like* it. I am a rank impostor. There will be an awful explosion some day, if we don't look out."

"A pleasant explosion for you. Surely you are not quite such a fool as to suppose that any one would think the worse of you because you are a rich man."

Mark's thoughts wandered to Honor Gordon, and he made no answer.

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"We have gone too far to go back," continued Waring, impressively, "at least as far as Shirani is concerned. We might shift our sky and go to Simla, and then after a time allow the truth to ooze out."

"I am desperately sorry I ever tampered with the truth," cried the other, starting to his feet and beginning to walk about the verandah. "I have never told a direct lie, and no one has ever suspected *me*—I have not a rich air, nor the tastes of a wealthy man; now, you"—suddenly halting before Clarence, and looking him all over—"have both."

"True, oh king! and people jumped at their own conclusions. Can *we* help that? It has given me a ripping good time, and saved you a lot of bother and annoyance. Why, the girl in the plaid waistcoat would have married you months ago."

"Not she! I'm not so easily married as all that!" rejoined the other indignantly.

"I am much relieved to hear it. I am glad you remember Uncle Dan's instruc-

tions. I was afraid they were beginning to slip out of your head, and bearing them in mind, I think the sooner, for *all* parties, that you clear out of Shirani the better."

"I am not going to budge," said Jervis resolutely; "and you know the reason."

Waring blew away a mouthful of smoke, and then drawled out—"Of course—Miss Gordon."

"No; my father," reddening like a girl. "You know he lives within forty miles of this, and that was what made me so keen to come to Shirani."

"Yes, I understand perfectly; and so keen to *stay!*"

"I wrote to him," ignoring this innuendo, "and said I would wait on here till October, hoping to see him."

"You'll never see him," now bringing a volume of smoke down his nostrils.

"Time will tell—I hope I shall."

"And time stands still for no man! The Athertons and Miss Potter start in ten days, and I shall accompany them; there

is nothing like travelling with a young lady for advancing one's interests—as *you* know, my boy. Now, don't be angry. Yes, I'm off. I'm not heir to a millionaire, and I must consult *my* interests. If you will take my advice, you will join the little party."

"No, thank you; I shall stay here."

"Do you mean to say that you will stick to this dead-and-alive place for the next four months?"

"I do—at any rate till my father sends for me"—and he paused for a second—"or until the end of the season."

"In fact, in plain English, *until the Brandes go down*," repeated Clarence significantly; and rising, and tossing away the end of his cigarette, he strolled over to the adjacent mess.

CHAPTER XX.

MISS PASKE DEFIES HER AUNT.

Mrs. Langrishe gave an exceedingly languid acquiescence to the constant remark, "What a charming girl Miss Gordon is! and what a favourite she has become! Her aunt and uncle are quite devoted to her." She was thinking sadly on these occasions of her own niece, Lalla, who danced like a fairy, or moonbeams on the sea, who was always surrounded at balls, whose banjo playing and smart sayings made her indispensable; no entertainment was considered complete without Miss Paske.

These social triumphs were delightful; but, alas! the fair Lalla was *Joie de rue*,

douleur de maison, and her aunt, who smiled so complacently in public when congratulated on her young relative's social successes, knew in her heart that that same relative had proved a delusion and a cruel fraud. Fanny had been *much* cleverer than she supposed in passing on a veritable infliction — a very base little counterfeit coin. It was true that Fanny had not actually lied in her description. Lalla was good-looking, *piquante*, accomplished, and even-tempered; but an uneven temper would have been far easier to cope with. When remonstrated with, or spoken to sharply, the young lady merely smiled. When desired not to do such and such a thing, she did it—and smiled. When her aunt, on rare occasions, lost her temper with her, she positively beamed. She never attempted to argue, but simply went her own way, as steadily obdurate as a whole train of commissariat mules.

She was distinctly forbidden to go to Sunday picnics, but went to them neverthe-

less. She was requested not to sit in "kala juggas" (dark corners) at balls. Mrs. Langrishe might have saved her breath, for at balls, if she happened by chance to glance into one, she was almost certain to see some young man in company with her incorrigible niece, who would nod at her with a radiant expression, and laughingly refuse to go home.

Poor Mrs. Langrishe! she could not make a scene. Lalla, crafty Lalla, was well aware that her aunt would patiently submit to any private indignity sooner than the world should suspect that her niece was wholly out of hand, and that she could not manage her. Miss Paske traded comfortably on this knowledge, until she nearly drove her stately chaperon crazy.

The young lady was determined to be amused, and to make the best of life, and possibly to marry well. She treated herself in her aunt's house as an honoured and distinguished guest—ordered the servants about, upset existing arrangements, and

asked men constantly to lunch or tea, or—oh, climax!—dinner. If remonstrated with, she merely remarked, with her serene, bewitching smile—

"Oh, but, darling"—she always called Mrs. Langrishe "darling," even at the most critical moments—"I always did it at Aunt Fanny's! she never objected; *she* was so hospitable."

She gave no assistance in the house, and usually sat in her own room curling her fringe, studying her parts, or writing letters. Her chief intimate was Mrs. Dashwood, who had been on the stage, and the men of the theatrical set; and she blandly informed her horrified chaperon that she had been considered the fastest girl in India, and gloried in the distinction.

"In Calcutta they called me 'the sky-scraper,'" she added, with a complacent laugh.

What was to be done? This was a question Mrs. Langrishe put to Granby, and then to herself. Never, never had she

spent such a miserable time as during this last two months. To be flouted, mocked, and ordered about under her own roof; to be defied, caressed, and called endearing names by a penniless, detestable minx, who was dependent on her even for money for postage stamps and offertory! Should she pay her passage and pack her off home? No, she would not confess herself beaten—she, the clever woman of the family! She would marry the little wretch well—in a manner that would redound to her own credit—and then wash her hands of her *for ever*.

* * * * *

The first series of theatricals were an immense success. Miss Paske was the principal lady in the piece, and looked charming from across the footlights. Captain Waring, who was fond of the stage, had gone behind the scenes, and painted Lalla's pert little face at her own request, which same civility occasioned considerable heartburning and jealousy among the other

ladies, especially as the result was a complete artistic triumph.

Every one was carried away by the Prima Donna's vivacious acting and sprightly dancing, which was both dashing and graceful — in short, the very poetry of motion. Her dress, too—what there was of it—was perfect in every detail. Skirt-dancing was as yet in its infancy—a lady *figurante* was a rare spectacle on an Indian stage, and the novel and astonishing character of the performance swept the spectators off their feet, and Lalla and Toby Joy shared the honours of the night between them.

Mrs. Langrishe was secretly horrified. She had only seen Lalla's costume in the piece; Lalla and the Dirzee (whom she entirely monopolized) had composed it together—she had planned, he had carried out her sketch. There had been mysterious conferences and tryings on, from which her aunt had been rigidly excluded, and Mrs. Langrishe was much too proud to affect an

interest or curiosity in the matter; but in her wildest moments she had never dreamt of the character of the dress—or its limits!

As she sat in the front row, gazing at the waving arms and supple limbs of her odious niece, little did her neighbours guess that a social martyr was among them,—a martyr whose sufferings were still further aggravated by the self-satisfied smirk and airy kiss the fair dancer had deigned to fling her!

Afterwards, when Lalla, closely cloaked and hooded, was modestly receiving the congratulations of her friends, she remarked to them bashfully—

"Oh, you have *no* idea how nervous I was at first! My poor little knees were actually shaking under me."

"Were they? I did not notice *them*," rejoined Mrs. Brande in her severest manner; and listeners allowed that on this occasion "old mother Brande had scored!"

Mrs. Langrishe the next morning, having first fortified herself with a glass of wine, entered her niece's bower, in order to

administer a really sound scolding, the gist of which was (as repeated by the listening Ayah to other deeply interested domestics, as she took a pull at the cook's huka)—

"As long as you are in *my* house, and under my care, you must behave yourself properly. If this is impossible, as I fear it is, I shall send you straight home. The Ayah will take you to Bombay, and see you off second-class, though the class that best suits your manners is really the steerage. Your acting, and, to a certain extent, your dancing, was all very well; but I do not wonder that Mrs. Brande was shocked at your dress, or rather the want of it—scarcely below your knees!"

"Mrs. Brande is a narrow-minded old toad!" cried Lalla contemptuously. "I don't believe she was ever in an English theatre in her life. She should see some of the dresses at home!"

"This is not the way to get yourself settled, and you know it," pursued her aunt. "It was most fortunate that Sir

Gloster was not present—he is a man with very correct ideas."

"That stupid, sluggish bumpkin! what are his ideas to me?" scoffed Lalla, with a maddening smile.

"I wish he had an idea *of* you," retorted her aunt. "I'm sure I should be most thankful. However, you are aware that we go down in four months, and remember, that this is your last chance!"

Hereupon, according to the Ayah, Miss Sahib "plenty laugh."

But Miss Sahib evidently laid the advice to heart. For a few days she was extremely piano and demure, accepting her recently-won honours and the appellation of "Miss Taglioni" with an air of meek protest that was simply delightful.

The play was soon succeeded by a concert at the club; and here Miss Gordon, with her violin, put Miss Paske completely in the shade for once. What a contrast they presented. The little smirking, bowing, grimacing figure in pink, with clouds of

fluffy hair, and banjo, streaming with gay ribbons, who made up for lack of voice, by expression, chic, and impudence, and threw Tommy Atkins, in the four anna seats, into a delirium of enthusiasm.

Then came the tall young lady in white, with statuesque arms, who gradually cast a spell of enchantment over her listeners, and held the emotions of her audience in the hollow of the small hand that guided her bow.

For once Mrs. Brande felt conscious that Honor had quite, as she mentally expressed it, "snuffed out that brazen little monkey," and though personally she preferred the banjo and nigger melodies, the audience in the two rupee places apparently did *not*, for they applauded enthusiastically, and stamped and shouted, "Encore! encore!" and seemed ready to tear the house down. And even young Jervis, usually so retiring and undemonstrative, had clapped until he had split his gloves.

Mrs. Langrishe was not behindhand with

her plaudits. She would not leave it in any one's power to declare that she was jealous of Miss Gordon's overwhelming success, but to herself she said—

"Oh, if Honor Gordon was but *her* niece! How thankfully would she exchange relations with Mrs. Brande. Here was a simple, well-bred girl, who could shine anywhere, and was quite thrown away in her present hands. It was true that Sir Gloster seemed much struck; everyone saw *that*, except the girl herself, and her old bat of an aunt. He had never taken his eyes off her, as she stood before the footlights, and she had made an undeniably charming picture, slim and graceful, with an old-fashioned air of maidenly dignity, and *how* she played!

She glanced at her own special young lady, now coming forward to sing yet another ditty, amidst the uproarious encouragement of the back benches.

Lalla was pretty, her fair soft hair was wisped up anyhow (a studied art), her eyes

were bright, her style *piquante*, but her expression was everything, and oh, what a little demon she was!

And then she sang—certainly she was the most successful cantatrice who ever sang without a voice.

"What a charming inmate your niece must be, Mrs. Langrishe," observed a lady next her. "So amusing and bright, quite a *sunbeam* in the house."

To which the poor martyr rejoined with a somewhat rigid smile, "Oh yes, indeed, quite delightful."

She envied Mrs. Brande her treasure still more, when, as they were leaving the club, she noticed Honor affectionately wrapping up her aunt—for it had turned out a wet night—and making some playful joke as she tied a hood under her ample chin. *Her* niece had helped herself to the only mackintosh, and had rolled away in her rickshaw, among the first flight, with a young man riding beside her.

"She went off with Toby Joy! I really am

astonished that Mrs. Langrishe allows her to be so independent," said a voice (a woman's) in the dark, close beside that ill-used lady, and happily unaware of her vicinity.

Miserable Mrs. Langrishe, if they only knew *all*, the most stony-hearted would surely commiserate her.

She returned home alone, firmly resolved to give Lalla a talking to, but when she arrived—her anger had ebbed. She discovered the culprit reclining in an easy-chair, smoking a friendly cigarette with Granby, and entertaining him with inimitable mimicry of some of her fellow performers.

"Oh, so you have appeared at last!" cried Lalla, with languid surprise. "Fie, fie, how late you are, darling! *I've* been home ages. I took the waterproof to cover up my beloved banjo—I 'wrapped it up in its tarpaulin jacket,' you know the song. I was sure, as I did not see you, that some horrible bore had got hold of you, and I knew you would *hate* to keep me waiting in the rain, so I dashed off home at once."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT STARVATION PICNIC.

THE "picnic" season at Shirani set in with unexampled severity. There were tea picnics—an inexpensive form of entertainment, dear to the economically disposed, who flattered themselves that they could wipe out all social debts by a table-cloth spread on a mossy slope (within an easy ride from cantonment), and to this they bid their friends in order to partake of cheap fruit, bazaar-made cake, and smoked tea —the selected "view" supplying every deficiency. There were snug little select tea-parties, where the viands were dainty and luxurious, and to match the company—appetizing luncheons, carried off to be

discussed miles away under pine trees, and facing indistinct blue valleys and brilliantly white peaks; and of all these expeditions, the "Noah's Ark" picnic was indisputably the most popular.

In June the climate, society, scenery of Shirani all pointed to picnics, with again picnics, and more picnics. They were unceremonious, easily enjoyed, easily declined. New-comers from below, after a month among dim cool pine woods, or a critical study of a deep valley, clothed with gorgeous forest trees, blazing with red, pink, and white rhododendrons, found it difficult to believe that there was such a place far beneath them as tawny-coloured hard-baked plains, over which, instead of a delicate fragrant breeze, roared the brazen-mouthed blast of the fire-eating hot winds. The *al fresco* season culminated in a "married ladies'" picnic—chiefly got up by Mrs. Langrishe and Mrs. Brande. There had been a committee meeting at the ladies' room at the club; Mrs. Langrishe

was voted secretary—being very capable with her pen. The conference had been held with closed doors — solemn — and secret.

All the same, some of the motions and arrangements had leaked out. It was known that Mrs. Brande had volunteered to provide the champagne — also fowls, hams, and raised pies. Mrs. Sladen was down for afternoon tea, cups and saucers, milk, sugar, and cake. Mrs. Dashwood provided cheroots, cigarettes, and pegs.

Mrs. Loyd, the sweets, tarts, jellies, and *méringues*.

Mrs. Clark, the soup.

Mrs. Glover, the ices. The thing was to be done in style.

Mrs. Paul, the Padré's wife (having a large family), was let off with coffee.

"Your own cups and spoons of course," added the secretary imperatively.

Mrs. Langrishe—there was a long-drawn breath of expectancy, as she read out her own name, "Well, she would provide the

appointments, table-cloths, and napkins, plates, knives and forks, bread, salad—and water." There was a pause, and she continued impressively—

"It was not *every* one who would care to risk their nice things" (she would borrow from Manockjee, the Parsee shop); "but *she* would venture," and her meek coadjutors accepted her contribution just as gratefully as Mrs. Brande's champagne and ham. It was one of her usual master strokes, and the picnic would cost her nothing, beyond the use of some house linen and a few loaves of bread.

All the station were to be invited; the place selected was five miles from Shirani; the guests were to assemble at Mrs. Langrishe's house. With her usual ability, she took the entire honours upon herself, and got the whole credit of the entertainment in anticipation. Of course it was to be a Noah's Ark affair.

The company met at half-past eleven at "St. Germain's" (Major Langrishe's

Bungalow), and Mrs. Brande, who was supplying the most expensive portion of the feast, felt it a *little* hard to be received as a guest by the woman who was only bringing crockery and table-cloths,—indeed all the hostesses were secretly restive and displeased. The ladies dipped their hands into a basket and each drew out a man's name (their fate) on a slip of paper, and although Lalla believed that she had thrust him well down to the bottom—with a little twist in the paper, so that she could recognize it herself—Honor drew the prize, in the shape of Sir Gloster Sandilands, to that gentleman's transparent delight. Subsequently Honor offered to exchange him, or draw again, when Lalla sharply assured her that "there was some mistake—that his name had been written twice, and that she had also drawn the baronet." Finally it was arranged that Honor and Lalla should divide—Honor to ride to the picnic with Mr. Jervis, and Lalla with Sir Gloster, and to exchange cavaliers on

the return journey. Thus the affair was amicably settled. Honor would have been thankful to have avoided the baronet altogether: she had more than a dim idea that he liked her, and he was always talking to her about his place at home, and his mother, and saying how much he wished that he could introduce her to both. Mrs. Brande could not complain that *he* did not call: on one pretext or other, he came every day, bringing a book, or a paper, or looking in to ask the name of some wild flower, or for a cup of tea, or without any excuse at all, but simply to sit and stare at Honor Gordon.

Mrs. Brande was not quite such a blind bat as some people supposed. This possible match had some advantages. It would all but be the death of Mrs. Langrishe! her niece would be Lady Sandilands; but, on the other hand, she could not bear to lose Honor! Shirani had its eyes wide open also, and Mrs. Daubeny had countermanded her daughter's two new dresses.

At last the *cortège* set out for the scene of their next meal, some riding, some on foot, many ladies in dandies. The distance was five miles, through leafy dells, green glades, and steep paths cut out through the forest. Captain Waring had drawn the heiress, and was happy; Sir Gloster was with Lalla, who was radiant. There was a considerable distance between some couples, whilst others kept as close together as a girls' school.

"I did not know that dogs were invited to picnics!" exclaimed a querulous voice from a dandy, coming up behind Miss Gordon, Mr. Jervis, and Ben.

"Ben had a special card of invitation all to himself, Mrs. Dashwood," replied his owner.

"Well, I trust he is the only one of his species that has been thus honoured, and that it is not going to be a precedent."

"Don't you like dogs?" inquired Jervis.

"No, I'm desperately afraid of them, and they seem to know it. The only dog

I could possibly bring myself to tolerate would be a dog without teeth! Well, I must be pushing on—I hope you are making yourself very agreeable to Miss Gordon, Mr. Jervis?" she added playfully.

"I'm afraid not. My stock of ideas is rather low; perhaps you can suggest some novel and interesting topic."

"Your own life and adventures," cried the lady, as she passed ahead of them; "try that."

"What were we talking about?" said Jervis. "Shall we go back to the last remark but six?"

"Easier said than done," rejoined his companion gaily; "we must start a fresh subject."

"Well, I doubt if my life and adventures would be of thrilling interest," he continued, turning to Honor, and it struck her that she had never once heard her present companion allude in any way to his home or his belongings. This was a beautiful opening, if he would but avail himself of it.

"Mrs. Dashwood has set me a stiff task —it is not every one's fortune to have an adventurous career." (If all tales were true, sensational events had largely punctuated the lady's own history.) "Now, which would you rather have—interesting falsehoods, or very dull truths?"

"Neither, I think."

"And what about *your* life and adventures?"

"Oh, I have spent most of my days in a quiet little village, and can scarcely recall a single incident, except that I once upset a donkey cart!"

"I can go one better, as they say, for I have upset a coach!" then he coloured and added hastily, and as if he deprecated any questions, "I too have led a commonplace life. I was born out here, and was not sent home until I was six, for which reason I find my native tongue has come back to me."

"It has indeed—I have often been amazed at your extraordinary fluency in

talking Hindostani; I thought that you had a marvellous talent for languages."

"Which I have not, nor indeed for anything."

"Miss Paske says that you have a talent for silence," said Honor demurely.

"Miss Paske's sayings are being quoted all over the place, with the weight of so many proverbs! She says women do *all* their thinking in church. She declares that her sex lie from timidity—and nothing else. Shall I continue?"

"No; I should prefer your own original remarks, to Miss Paske at second hand," said Honor, "though I confess that I am responsible for introducing her into the conversation. After you came from India, what did you do?"

"I went to school—from school to college—then I lived in London, off and on, till I came out here. Our joint lives and adventures don't amount to much! I am always longing for some uncommon experience, but such things seem to fight shy of me."

"Look! There is poor Mrs. Sladen on that horrid pulling pony," interrupted Honor suddenly; "she is dreadfully afraid of it, but dare not say so——"

"Being between the devil and the deep sea?"

"Which is the deep sea? Colonel Sladen or the Budmash?" asked the young lady with an air of innocent inquiry.

"Whichever you please. I believe ages ago, when he was young and active, Sladen was a first-class man on a horse, and rode races. Who would think it to look at him now? he weighs about seventeen stone!"

"And completely upsets the old theory, that fat people are always good-natured!"

"He is keen enough about horses and ponies still; you may notice that he has always good animals."

"Good to look at," amended Miss Gordon quickly.

"Yes, and to go as well; and as he cannot ride them to sell, as he used to

do once, he now thrusts poor unfortunate Mrs Sladen into the saddle. The Noah's Ark animals have not been so badly paired," continued the young man. "Please look at the Dâk Bungalow fowl walking with the European ham! Do you think the combination was premeditated?"

"No, purely accidental, I should imagine. I must say that I think it is a shame, the way people are given nicknames!"

"I suppose it is an idle amusement for idle minds. I believe that I have been honoured with one or two new names myself—I don't mind in the least—and I happen to know for a fact that Waring is extremely pleased with his!"

"Which is more than would be the case with most people. For instance, do you suppose that Miss Cook would be pleased to hear that she is known as 'good plain Cook'?"

"Well, you know our nurses used to tell us, that it is better to be good than beautiful! And here we are!"

The rendezvous was now reached, Honor and her companion being almost the last to arrive. There was a superb and uninterrupted view of the snows, but the sight of something to eat would have been preferred by some folk. What had become of the coolies and the tiffin? The tablecloths were spread (and even decorated), but save for some bowls of salad, and a meagre allowance of rolls, nothing eatable was to be seen.

Inquiries were made, and at last the dreadful news began to circulate, at first by degrees, and was then officially confirmed. The luncheon had been lost!

Mrs. Langrishe and Mrs. Brande's khansamahs—who were at the head of affairs—were deadly rivals. Mrs. Langrishe's man wished to be leader (like his mistress); he laid down the law, and he ordered every one's coolies and servants to place themselves under his directions. "Instead of being quiet and shamed, as he ought to have been, the—the nouker" (*i.e.* servant)

"of a mem sahib who only sent empty plates." This was the idea of Mrs. Brande's khansamah, and to his opinion he gave loud and angry utterance. A desperate quarrel ensued. He said the lunch was to be sent to one place—Mrs. Brande's man declared as emphatically that it was to be despatched to another. The latter was the most powerful, and carried his point, and what was worse, carried all the other servants and coolies away with him! At this moment they were carefully laying out a really excellent repast, at a favourite rendezvous, exactly seven miles on the other side of Shirani, and twelve from the present hungry company.

Mrs. Langrishe's fare—yes, it had leaked out—was all that was to be set before them!

Some people were extremely angry. Colonel Sladen, who had valued his thirst at ten rupees—not that any one was anxious to purchase it—was really almost beside himself! Sir Gloster, though he

was in love, looked desperately glum. "Ben" Brande, I must honestly confess, was visibly disappointed. Dry bread and salad were not in his line, and he had affectionate recollections of a delicious smell from his mistress's cook house. Some people laughed—Honor and her companion were amongst the most hilarious.

Mrs. Langrishe was shown in her true colours for once, and had retired into somewhat mortified retreat under a neighbouring rock. Mrs. Brande was overwhelmed. "Where," she asked with tears in her voice, "was her khansamah? Where were her raised pies, her Grecian salad, her iced asparagus?" But though her hospitable soul was vexed, she was not sorry that her rival's generous share should be thus set forth before every eye.

The party, on the whole, took this unparalleled catastrophe uncommonly well. They ate dry bread (with or without salt), drank water, and wound up with lettuces. Afterwards the men smoked themselves

into complete serenity. If there had only been tea, but, alas! the tea had followed the infamous example of the champagne.

Naturally such a lunch had not taken long to despatch. What was to be done? How was the next empty hour to be put in?

And here Miss Lalla Paske came forward, and threw herself into the gap. In after days, her aunt always credited Lalla with *one* good action.

Rising, without waiting to catch any one's eye, she slowly sauntered off with her little swaggering air, and mounting a mossy rock, and arranging herself in a picturesque attitude, despatched a cavalier for her banjo, which she presently began to thrum, and had soon (as she desired) collected a crowd. When she had assembled a sufficiently large audience, she struck up a nigger melody, with admirable art and liveliness, and instantly every male voice was joining in the chorus. Mrs. Langrishe and Mrs. Brande arrived together upon the

scene, and beheld the sprightly Lalla, the centre of attraction, mounted on an impromptu throne, surrounded by admirers. Such moments were some of her unhappy aunt's few compensations. Oh! if one of these admirers would but come forward and ask for the delicate, wiry little hand, now so skilfully thrumming a *ranche* melody.

The fair songstress made a charming picture, she had the family instinct for effect,—her supple figure was thrown into delightful relief by a dense green background, and one pretty little foot dangled carelessly over a slab of rock—such a pretty little foot, in such a pretty little shoe!

And where was Mrs. Brande's niece? Standing among the crowd, a mere spectator of her rival's success. All at once Lalla suddenly handed her banjo to Sir Gloster, and said briskly—

"Now, who would like their fortunes told? Please don't all speak together."

"Lalla is really marvellous," whispered Mrs. Langrishe to her companion. "She

has made quite a study of palmistry, and is most successful."

Mrs. Brande looked severely incredulous, but she could see that Lalla was now closely invested by a circle of outspread palms, and a clamouring crowd of would-be clients. (Some people declared that this accomplishment was merely an excuse on Miss Paske's part for holding men's hands, and that she knew absolutely nothing of the gipsy's art, but was a shrewd judge of character, and made up cleverly as she went along.) Also another notable and highly suspicious fact — she invariably meted out the most alarming fortunes to those she did not like. She appeared to take a vindictive pleasure in calmly expatiating on their impending calamities, and made the most sinister announcements with a smile.

At present she was examining Mrs. Brande's hand, with a puckered, thoughtful brow.

She had not time to do all the hands, she

declared, and those she did undertake must be entirely of her own selection.

"You have had an unexpected share of this world's goods," she stated at last, raising her voice, so that every syllable was audible. "You will always be well-to-do, but your present hopes will be disappointed. In the course of time, your life will undergo a change. You are threatened with softening of the brain—yes! your head line runs down upon the moon—you will probably be an incurable idiot, and bed-ridden for many years."

"*Thank* you," cried Mrs. Brande, snatching away her fat hand. "That will do me for the present;" and she fell back among the crowd, muttering disjointed sentences, that sounded like "London—had up in police-court, fortune-telling against the law—six months' hard labour." But Mrs. Brande's terrible fate and smothered indignation failed to dissuade others, in answer to Miss Lalla's clear—

"The next."

Miss Ryder, a pretty girl, with fair hair, and pathetic blue eyes, came timidly forward, and gazed pleadingly at the oracle.

"Yes — humph," critically examining Miss Ryder's pink palm. "Your head is entirely governed by your heart, and oh dear me! there is a dreadful cross on the heart line, a broken marriage. No," turning the hand sideways, "I see no marriage line on your hand, but a great many small worries; truthfulness is *not* an attribute— no; you will live long, and enjoy fairly good health."

Miss Ryder shrank back, with a distinctly sobered countenance, and in answer to the fortune-teller's desire, Mark Jervis was pushed forward. He tendered his hand reluctantly, and only for the Englishman's usual hatred of a fuss, would have withheld it altogether. Miss Paske disliked Mr. Jervis with his cool, ambiguous manner— he was a mere hanger on, scarcely worth powder and shot, but he was a friend of

Honor Gordon's, and she would make him ridiculous for her benefit!

"Oh, what a hand!" she exclaimed, with a scornful laugh. "A fair enough head line, a great capacity for holding your tongue, especially on any subject concerning yourself. You do not think it necessary to tell the *whole* truth on all occasions." This was a palpable home-thrust, for in the face of half Shirani, Mark Jervis coloured visibly. "Secret, clear-headed, with great self-command. Yes; you would make a fine conspirator, and *I think* you are a bit of an impostor." Again the colour deepened in the subject's tan cheek. "Line of heart *nil*. Fate much broken, I see—the mark of some kind of imprisonment; a life solitary and apart," and holding the palm nearer to her eyes, "there is a great and unexpected change of fortune in store for you, which entails trouble. And there is the mark—of a violent death, or you will be the cause of another person's death—the lines," dropping his hand with

a hopeless gesture, "are really too faint to read anything more with success."

"Thanks awfully; it is very good of you to let me down so easily. I know you see a halter in my hand, but have wished to spare my feelings."

Lalla looked at him indignantly—he was laughing. How dared he laugh at her?

"Now, Sir Gloster, it is your turn"—beckoning to him graciously.

Sir Gloster thrust out a very large, soft, white hand, and said, "This is worse than the stool of repentance. If you discover anything very bad, I implore you to whisper it in my ear, my dear Miss Paske."

"Now, this really *is* a hand!" she exclaimed, looking round as if she was surprised to find that it was not a foot! "You have a splendid head line."

Sir Gloster coloured consciously, and glanced surreptitiously at Honor, as much as to say, "I hope you heard *that!*"

"Quite a commanding intellect—you could do almost anything you chose—and

are likely to be successful in your aims. A strong will; a magnificent line of fate—yes, yes, yes, *all* the good things! You will marry a fair wife; you will meet her in India—in fact, you *have* met her already. You had some illnesses before you were ten——"

"That's safe," scoffed Mrs. Brande from the background; "teething and measles—*I* could have told that!"

"You have really a splendid hand," pursued Lalla. "I should like to make a cast of it."

"She would like to have it altogether," grunted Colonel Sladen to his immediate neighbours.

"Now, Captain Waring, for you?" cried the oracle, invitingly.

Captain Waring, smiling, prosperous, perfectly ready to be amused, stepped forward with alacrity.

"A fine broad palm! A magnificent line of fate; great riches are strongly marked—rather susceptible to our sex; a wonderful

power of drawing people to you; you will not marry for some years." As he stood aside, Lalla said, "Last, but not least, Miss Gordon. Oh, come along, Miss Gordon"—beckoning with an imperious finger.

"Thank you, I would rather not be done," she answered stiffly.

"What?" inquired young Jervis, in an undertone. "*Not* be butchered to make a station's holiday?"

"Oh, nonsense!" persisted Lalla rather shrilly. "Your aunt has been 'done,' as you call it, and I am anxious to see what type your hand belongs to—it's sure to be artistic."

"There is a nice little bait for you," whispered Jervis. "Surely you cannot refuse *that*."

"Oh, Miss Gordon, we all want to hear your fortune," cried several voices; and, in spite of her unwillingness, Honor soon found herself in Miss Paske's clutches.

"Ahem! Artistic, yes. A dark hand;

a *little* deceitful; not much heart; *very* ambitious. I see some disease, like small-pox, or a bad accident, in store for you; you will marry when you are about forty. Let me look again. No, you and your husband will *not* agree. You will live long, and die suddenly."

"How I wish some one could tell Miss Paske's fortune!" cried Captain Waring, with unusual animation. "Shall I try?" suddenly seizing it. "Great vivacity; despotic will; love of admiration; line of heart *nil;* and the girdle of Venus—oh—oh——"

"Oh, nonsense!"—wrenching it away impatiently. "Here is Mr. Joy, who knows something *far* more interesting—a new and much shorter way of going home."

This was seemingly an important piece of intelligence. Yes, there was a decided alacrity about getting under way. Hunger is a vulgar, but a very human weakness, and soon every one set off in the wake of

scatter-brained Toby and Miss Paske; and nothing but a few scraps of newspaper and cigar-ends marked the conclusion of what is known to this day in Shirani as the "Great Starvation Picnic."

CHAPTER XXII.

TOBY JOY'S SHORT CUT.

HONOR GORDON and Sir Gloster sent their ponies on ahead—as the path was all down-hill—and elected to walk. To tell the truth, the gentleman was a nervous rider, and greatly preferred pedestrian exercise. It was an ominous fact, that whereas Sir Gloster had closely accompanied Miss Gordon and her escort on their way to the picnic—so much so, indeed, as to be almost always within earshot—he now brusquely shook off any of the party who evinced a desire to attach themselves to him and his companion.

"Miss Paske was most amusing as a fortune-teller and all that sort of thing,"

he remarked, "but were you not rather uneasy about your future?"

"Not a bit"—contemptuously kicking a little cone downhill; "she made it up as she went along."

"She was awfully down on young Jervis. What a career she painted for him, poor beggar!"

"The wish was doubtless father to the thought. She does not like him."

"And the idea of her saying that you would not be married till you were forty! As if you could not marry to-morrow, if you chose!"

Honor began to feel uncomfortable and to long for the presence of a third person: she made a lively gesture of dissent as she prepared to scramble down an exceedingly steep and greasy footpath.

"You know you could," pursued Sir Gloster, seizing her hand, by way of giving her assistance, and nearly precipitating her to mother earth. "For example, you might marry *me*."

Miss Paske had just assured him that he would succeed in his aims, and he was resolved to test her prophecy without delay.

"Oh, Sir Gloster!" exclaimed the young lady, vainly trying to release her fingers.

"You will let me keep this dear little hand for ever? I fell in love with you almost from the first. You are beautiful and musical, and would understand at once the fitness of things. My mother would like you. Do you think you could care for me, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, Sir Gloster," she repeated, pausing on the path, a sudden red suffusing her cheeks, and looking at him with real dismay, "I like you—but not in that way."

"Perhaps I have been too sudden. If I were to wait a week or two. Let me talk to your aunt?"

"No, no, please"—with anxious repudiation. "It would make no difference. I am sorry, but I never, never could care for you as you wish."

Mrs. Sladen and Mark Jervis, who were

behind, descending the same zigzag path, happened to be immediately above the pair. Sounds ascend, and they were at the moment silent, when suddenly, through the leaves, and the cool evening air, a voice seemed wafted to their feet, which said—

"*I have been too sudden. If I were to wait a week or two. Let me talk to your aunt.*"

Mrs. Sladen and her companion looked straight at one another, and became guiltily crimson. There was a moment's pause, ere the man exclaimed—

"There is no use in our pretending we are *deaf!* We have just heard what was never meant for other ears, and I'm awfully sorry."

"So am I," she answered; "sorry in one way, glad in another."

"I doubt if Mrs. Brande would share your joy," he retorted with a significant smile.

"Of course we will keep it a dead secret."

"Of course"—emphatically. "On the whole," with a short laugh, "I am not sure that it is not safer to *write*."

"Is this what you will do?" she inquired playfully.

"I don't know, but I certainly have had a lesson *not* to try my fate coming home from a crowded picnic. What a dismal walk those two will have! Can you imagine a more unpleasant *tête-à-tête?* What *can* they talk about now?"

"Their walk, and every one's, seems ended here," remarked Mrs. Sladen, pointing to a crowd of coolies, dandies, men, ladies, and ponies who were all jammed together and making a great noise.

"Of course, this is Toby Joy's short cut, and most likely a practical joke," exclaimed Jervis. "I believe he was at the bottom of the lost lunch too."

The much-boasted short cut was likely to prove the proverbial "longest way round," and now afforded a very disagreeable surprise to the company of merry pleasure-

seekers. They had been descending a densely wooded shoulder of a hill, with the cheery confidence of ignorance, to where at one point an artificially banked-up and stone-faced road crossed a deep gorge.

The path, owing to the action of the rain, had slipped down, and there was now but a precarious footing across the breach, barely wide enough for a single pony—and that a steady one. Above, towered the hill, almost sheer; below, lay the blue shale precipice, clothed in fir trees, bushes, and brambles. To a hill coolie, or a person with a good head, it was passable; at least twenty had gone over, including Mrs. Brande in her dandy, who waved her hand jauntily as she was carried across. She was a plucky woman, as far as precipices were concerned.

Some who were nervous hesitated on the brink—they were torn between two conflicting emotions, hunger and fear; many were actually beginning to retrace their steps. Toby Joy, on his hard-mouthed yellow

"tat," was riding backwards and forwards over the chasm to demonstrate how easy it was, and bragging and joking and making himself so conspicuous that some of his misguided victims — including Colonel Sladen—would not have been at all sorry if he had vanished down the Khud.

Colonel Sladen's hunger stimulated his temper. The traditional bear with a sore head was a playful and gentle animal, in comparison to him, at the present moment. He had been a noted horseman in his day, but being now much too heavy to ride, he was fond of bragging of his ponies, and thrusting that light weight, his unhappy wife, into positions that made her blood run ice, and then he would boast and say, "Pooh! the pony is a lamb! My wife rides him, rides him with a thread, sir;" and he would straddle his legs, and swagger about the club, and subsequently sell the animal at a high figure.

"A nasty place to ride across! Not a bit of it—it's safer than doing it on foot.

These hill ponies never make mistakes." This he had remarked in his gruffest tone to Captain Waring, whose fair companion was literally trembling on the brink. "Wait —and just you watch how my wife will do it, on the Budmash—she will show you all the way. Milly," he bellowed, looking up the hill, "come along, come along."

"Oh," she exclaimed, turning a face as white as death on Mark, "I really dare not ride across that place. I have no nerve now, and this is the shying pony."

"Come on! Don't you see that you are stopping up the road?" roared her lord and master, indicating the various people who were sneaking back. Then, as she joined him, he added in a lower tone—

"I would not be such a coward to save my life."

"I am a coward," she muttered to Mark with a ghastly smile, "and I doubt if even that will save my life;" and she began to put her pony in motion.

"It is only fifty yards across," said

Jervis, encouragingly; "it will be over in two minutes. I'll get off and lead your pony, and I guarantee to take you over safely."

"Are you going?" cried Colonel Sladen, impatiently. "Get along, and give the other women a lead. Oh!" to her escort, who had dismounted, "are you going too? Quite unnecessary."

There was a sudden cessation of talking, argument, grumbling, chaff, and laughter. A curious silence fell on both sides of the bad bit. People looked on with awed, grave, or excited faces, as if they were witnessing some sensational drama, whilst they watched with breathless interest a notoriously timid little woman, on a notoriously ill-tempered pony, risking her life in obedience to her husband's commands. She might get across safely, then again she might not. The chances were about even.

"Come along," said Jervis, cheerfully, taking the Budmash by the head, with an air that showed that pink-eyed, red-

haired gentleman that he was not going to stand any nonsense.

"Shut your eyes," continued the young man, "and imagine that you are on a turnpike road; you will be at the other side before you really think that you have started. We are halfway across now."

Yes, half of the journey had been satisfactorily accomplished. The Budmash led like a lamb; the tension of expectation had relaxed. Spectators were beginning to breathe freely, and even to turn away, when all at once there was a sound of galloping, a wild yell, a crash, a rattle of shale, and Mrs. Sladen, the pony, and Jervis had vanished down the Khud! There had been a momentary vision of two struggling people, four madly kicking shining shoes, and they had disappeared into a chasm of trees, and were completely lost to sight.

And what had caused the accident?

Why, Toby Joy, of course. Toby, who had been indulging in an outburst of

tomfoolery, and riding backwards and forwards, dangling his feet out of the stirrups, and giving view-halloes, had taken too many liberties with a long-suffering animal —who was extremely anxious to get home, who was on the wrong side of the road for the tenth time, and who, when he at last "got a lead" from another pony, was simply not to be denied. His reckless master had left the reins on his neck, being, like every one else, an eager spectator of the martyrdom of Mrs. Sladen. Cupid had suddenly dashed forward, thundered down the declivity, cannoned violently against the Budmash, and hurled him and his companions into space.

For a moment there was an absolute silence, which was broken by Colonel Sladen, who roared out—

"My pony is killed!"

"And your wife!" cried Honor, who was standing beside him. "Is your wife nothing?" she repeated with passionate energy.

In a second a swarm of coolies, syces,

and their masters, led (to do him justice) by Toby Joy, were clambering down the jungle. Though very steep, it was not a sheer descent, and presently there came a shout of "All right."

The bushes, brambles, and long twining hill-creepers had broken the fall and saved them.

The first to be brought up was Mrs. Sladen, minus her hat, assisted by two gentlemen, and looking exceedingly white and small. Next came Jervis, with a streak of blood on his face and a torn coat. Last of all, the pony emerged, struggling, scrambling, driven, and dragged by about twenty energetic syces.

"You are not badly hurt, I hope?" said Honor, who had hurried across the broken path, and was the first to greet her friend as she was helped up to the bank.

"Not she," rejoined Colonel Sladen, brusquely; "she has only had the breath knocked out of her! Give her some whisky, and she will be all right."

As his wife sat down on a flat stone, and, after bravely trying to reassure every one, suddenly burst into loud hysterical sobbing, he added—

"How *can* you behave in this cry-baby way, Milly? You are not a bit hurt—it was all your own fault" (every misfortune or mistake was invariably "her own fault"). "If you had not stayed shilly-shallying, but started when I told you——"

"Oh, shut up, will you?" interrupted Jervis in a furious undertone.

Colonel Sladen became almost black in the face; but before he could recover his breath, Captain Waring broke into the group—

"Hullo, Mark, old chap, you are looking rather cheap—any bones broken?"

"I'm not much the worse. We had a wonderful escape; the brambles saved us, and the root of a big tree. My wrist——" becoming rather white.

"Your wrist!" repeated a doctor. "Let us have a look at it. Ah! and I see you have

cut your head. Oh, ho! the wrist is fractured; a simple fracture—it won't be much. I'll set it now;" which he proceeded to do on the spot—an operation superintended by bystanders with deepest interest.

Colonel Sladen watched with jealous scrutiny to see if the patient would flinch; but no, alas! he was doomed to disappointment. To tell the truth, as far as he was concerned, he would not have minded if the insolent young hound had broken his neck.

Mrs. Brande, who was always well to the front in cases of accidents or sickness, had long abandoned her dandy, suggested one person's flask, another person's smelling-bottle, and was full of most anxious solicitude.

"I'll be all right," said Jervis, looking round the eager circle. "Well, before I'm twice married, as old nurses say, Miss Paske"—suddenly catching sight of her bright, questioning, little marmoset eyes—"it would have been only friendly of you to have prepared us for *this!*"

"It's all very fine for you to laugh it off," protested Mrs. Brande. "You just get into my dandy this instant. I can walk; indeed, it will do me good; and you shall come home with me straight, and I'll nurse you."

But Jervis declared that no nursing was required, and would not hear of this arrangement. When his wrist had been set, and tied up with splints of wood and various handkerchiefs, he got on his pony and jogged away as briskly as the best.

The recent scene had not occupied more than twenty-five minutes, and soon every one was *en route*, every one but Sir Gloster, who had mysteriously vanished from the crowd, and had been one of the earliest to retreat and hurry home. Wise Mrs. Langrishe, who had not gone by the short cut, had seen him trot stolidly past her, alone, looking extraordinarily solemn and morose, and drew her own conclusions. What a goose the girl had been! He might yet be caught at the rebound—

stranger things had happened. Oh, if Lalla would only behave herself!

Two days after the great picnic, Mrs. Brande came into her drawing-room, where Mark Jervis, with his arm in a sling, was having tea with her niece and Mrs. Sladen. She looked quite flushed and upset as she said—

"What *do* you think, Honor? Here is Sir Gloster's visiting card—P.P.C., sent by a servant. I hear he has gone away for good. Don't you think he might have had the manners to call, after all the good dinners he has had here?" and she seemed on the verge of tears.

"But he did call, very often, aunt," replied Honor, without raising her eyes from Ben.

"Well, he never came to say good-bye, and I met him yesterday at Manockjee's buying tinned butter and European stores. He seemed to want to hide. I thought it was because he was ashamed of my seeing him bargaining down the butter

and cheese. So I just went after him, to put him at his ease, but somehow I missed him. I think he got away through the verandah, where they keep the old furniture."

"He has gone to the Snows, no doubt," remarked Mrs. Sladen, exchanging a swift glance with her confederate.

"Has he? There is something very queer and sudden about the whole thing. I cannot make it out."

She was not nearly as clever as Mrs. Langrishe, who had "made it out" at a glance, and held her tongue. Indeed, Mrs. Brande was almost the only person in Shirani who did not know that Sir Gloster Sandilands had proposed for her niece the day of the Great Starvation Picnic—and had been refused.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAPTAIN WARING'S ALTERNATIVE.

Mark Jervis had resisted all Mrs. Brande's invitations to "take him home and nurse him." He would be far better, quoth she, in her comfortable spare room, with the best of fresh eggs and new milk, than in that smoky Haddon Hall, at the mercy of his bearer, his meals irregular, and no comforts. She was well accustomed to nursing young men. How many junior civilians, brought to the verge of the grave by India's new scourge, typhoid, had owed their lives to Sara Brande—young men in her husband's district, who, just out from home, had scorned such precautions as the purchase of a filter and a cow! What tales, if she had chosen, could Mrs. Brande have

related of these same reckless invalids! How, at their first weak, but convalescent and ravenous stage, they had been so happy, so amazed, to find themselves yet in the land of the living, that they had babbled freely to their kind sympathetic nurse, forgetting how often they had laughed at "old Sally Brande." She seemed an angel, a more than mother to them now. Reclining on sofas and long chairs, in clothes much too large, twilight, or especially moonlight, often found them murmuring experiences and confidences into their nurse's attentive ear—"of girls at home," of debts, of scrapes, of good resolutions, of "new leaves" that were about to be turned over;—were not all these things written in the chronicles of Mrs. Brande's memory? Afterwards, when restored to life and vigour, with a sharpened appetite for life's enjoyments, these patients marvelled at themselves, their poor weak wagging tongues, their indiscretions! They felt *hot* as they thought of the secrets which

were buried in Mrs. Brande's bosom; but they were always polite to her, never would suffer a word in her disfavour, and many of them loved her. The cards, letters, and mementoes she received at Christmas were astonishing in variety, and in the difference of post-marks; from Tongoo to Suakim, from Kohat to Galle, these tokens of affectionate remembrance poured in from what Mrs. Brande was wont to term "her boys." She (*very* low be it whispered) was fond of young men! She liked Mark Jervis particularly, and would gladly have enrolled him in her brigade; for her boys were not merely Indian civilians—she had her recruits in the police, the opium department, the army, and the law.

This friendless young Englishman actually held out against notes (or chits), messages, even visits, and steadily refused to "come and be nursed."

His cousin was more at home these latter days; he was packing and preparing for a move.

"I say, Mark," he said, "your wrist will be all right in about ten days, so Kane says. I advise you to think better of it, and follow on to Simla. It's a ripping place — very different to dead-and-alive Shirani—I must go to-morrow, you know. I've promised to escort Mrs. Atherton and Miss Potter; the roads between this and the station are broken, and they are in a deadly fright. We shall do the whole journey together, and I have now only to ask and have."

"That is satisfactory, but as far as I'm concerned I'm a fixture here," replied Mark, "and you know why. I wrote to my father again urgently, and told him that time was flying, that I was going back in October, but I would wait here till then."

"So you may! I know the style your father is, Mark. He is a man who has lived so long out here, he has become fossilized—nothing outside India appeals to him, not even his son. There are

dozens like him; the easy-going life has penetrated to their very bones. He has his well-trained servants, his excellent food and liquor, his cheroots or his huka, his *Pioneer*, his long armchair, his pet grievance; he wants no more, least of all a smart young chap, with all sorts of advanced *fin-de-siècle* ideas, to come and rout him out."

"This is a fancy sketch, Clarence."

"Well, grant it! I will draw you a true portrait from life, and I could draw you half a dozen."

"We will have one to begin with—don't be too long about it, for I have promised to meet Scrope at four o'clock sharp; and I see Dum Sing waiting with the grey pony."

"Once upon a time I knew an old colonel (retired) who lived in the Nielgherries," began Waring. "All his family were out in the world, sons in the service, daughters married, and he was left stranded. He had his garden, his ponies, some ancient chums and old retainers, and though all his

relations were at the other end of the world, he would not budge. No less than three times he took his passage home; twice he went down to Madras, bag and baggage, accompanied by his servants. Once he was actually on board ship and in his cabin, but when they said, 'Any one for the shore,' he bundled his kit together and went back in a Massulah boat. He is out here still. I recollect another instance, an old general, a regular old derelict, clinging, as to a spar, to the last station he commanded. I saw him—and this was in the plains, mind you—going for his evening drive in his old carriage, with a pair of antediluvian horses—all alone, too. He had a venerable, long white beard, and was eighty-six years of age, and fond of saying, 'Thirty years ago, when I commanded this station!' The authorities and folks in general humoured him—people are not so much hustled out here, and have time to indulge old folk's fancies. He came to all the field days, and drew up behind the

saluting post in his old barouche. He thought the army was going to the dogs, I can tell you, and white helmets, white clothes, and canes, so many scandalous innovations. He had a heap of relations in England, never wrote to one of them, and left all his money to the grandson of his first love and the Friend in Need Society! Your father is just another of these people, as you will see."

"Time will tell; and, talking of time, Clarence, I think it is time that we should put an end to our little farce."

Clarence, who was sitting opposite to his companion, and leaning his arms on a rickety writing-table, raised his head and gazed at him rather blankly.

"Old boy, you must surely see that it has gone far enough—in fact, just a bit *too* far. When Miss Paske fired a wild shot in the dark, and said that I did not consider it always necessary to tell the whole truth about myself, I felt downright guilty; when she said I was a bit of an impostor, I know

I blushed like a peony! The deception, small at first, has grown to a big thing. I go by the name of 'the poor relation,' and all the mothers fight shy of me!"

"And is not that just what you particularly aimed at?" demanded Clarence, sharply. "I think the whole scheme has worked capitally. I'm sure I have played *my* part well, and so have you"—with a loud laugh of unnatural hilarity.

"Yes, but I feel as if I was acting a lie, though I have never actually uttered one in so many words. I have never said that I was poor——"

"Just as I pay the bills," interrupted his companion, "and have a prosperous air, but I never *said* I was rich." (Nevertheless, he acted and spoke precisely as a man to whom money was no object. Nor was it, being not his own, but Mr. Pollitt's.)

"When I started to play polo, men were politely amazed," continued Jervis; "when I gave fifty rupees for the new

harmonium, people looked astonished; the peon with the church-books, who gathers up our Sunday offerings, gazes at my chit for four rupees doubtfully; as he hands it to me, I know that he wonders at my extravagance, and whether I can afford it? We are going to give a bachelors' ball as a set off against the married ladies' picnic."

"I hope the supper will be within ten miles of the ball-room," interposed Waring, briskly.

"And Hawks the secretary, a very good sort, said to me, quite confidentially, 'You are not a rich Johnnie. I'll let you down easy; I'll take fifteen rupees.'"

"Yes; and what do you think of that young brute Skeggs, who has been going steadily to everything ever since he came up, breakfasts, teas, tiffins, dinners, balls—an ugly, pudding-faced chap?"

"Yes, fearfully handicapped by his hands and feet."

"He was asked to join, and make some return for the great hospitality that had

been shown to bachelors. He said no, promptly, he would not give an anna; and why, do you suppose?" pausing dramatically. "Because, in his opinion, a young man was a sufficient reward in himself for any amount of civilities."

"Mean beast! He was lunching at the Brandes' yesterday. But to return to our subject"—feeling conscious that his clever companion was slipping away from it. "You are off to-morrow, and before we go I really think we ought to take the opportunity of each appearing in our true and real character. Are you, like Barkis, willing?"

Clarence coloured a deep red, and looked annoyed.

"No—I am not—willing," he said with an effort. "We have only a few months more to play our parts, and I vote we see them out. I adopted the *rôle* of purse-bearer and leader to satisfy a caprice of yours, as you know, and I mean to stick to it till we are in Bombay Harbour."

"Well, I am very sorry now I was such a sensitive, vain idiot, as to get into a regular funk, simply because a few third-rate globe-trotters threw themselves at my money-bags. Why on earth did you not tell me that they were not a true specimen of Indian society? There are heaps of wealthy men out here—we have met them—heirs to titles, or really distinguished fellows, and no one bothers about them. I was too conceited and too great a fool."

"It's too late to think of that now!" —with easy scorn.

"No, better late than never! I intend to tell the Brandes and Mrs. Sladen, and Clifford, Scrope, Villiers, and one or two other fellows—that I am not what I seem."

"You must reckon with *me* first!" cried Clarence, hoarsely. "Your confidences, which mean blazoning the truth from one end of Shirani to the other, will play the very devil with me!"

"Why? What do you mean?" asked Jervis, with an air of cool surprise.

"Cannot you see? I've dropped into my old set and my old temptations; I cannot resist a bit of a gamble. The name of 'millionaire,' given for fun, has gained me credit. I owe money all over the place—rent, club, bills, Manockjee; three thousand rupees would not clear me, and if it comes out, say, to-morrow, that I am their dear customer of former days, without a penny to bless myself with, they will all be on me like a pack of hounds. Give me time, and I will sell the ponies well up at Simla, pick up a race or two, and marry"—with a laugh—"the heiress." (Never, to quote Lord Lytton, was there a man, who was an habitual gambler, otherwise than notably inaccurate in his calculations of probabilities in the ordinary affairs of life. Is it that such a man has become such a chronic drunkard of hope, that he sees double every chance in his favour?) "I am owed some money myself, but I must not press my debtor. However, I am safe to get it some day, and it's a tidy sum. I have a

first-rate book on Goodwood; I *can't* lose, and I must win. All I want is time, a long day, your honour"—grinning at his companion; nevertheless, although he grinned, his mouth was working nervously at the corners.

"But surely there are a good many thousand rupees still at the agent's?" asked Mark, rather blankly.

"Not a pice," was the astounding reply. "No, I was badly hit over the Liverpool, and of course I had no right to appropriate the funds in such a way. You need not tell me *that*. Gambling is a disease with me, and I cannot help it; it's worse than drink—comes far more expensive. There ought to be a retreat for confirmed gamblers such as I am, same as for dipsomaniacs. I may as well make a clean breast of it. I hoped to land a large stake, and make all square, but that brute 'Queer Customer' curled up and ran a cur in the finish, and put us all in a hole. I would give ten pounds to get a shot at him! I've had

confounded bad luck, and I must say in my own defence, that it was all *your* fault, from first to last. You put temptation in my way, you handed over the accounts and cheque-book, and asked no questions; and, by Jove!" he concluded with an air of virtuous resignation, "I've told you no lies. I am cleaned out."

"And supposing your Simla schemes fall through, and you are *not* paid, and your book on Goodwood is on the wrong side—what will you do?"

Clarence simply shrugged his broad shoulders.

"How are we to pay our bills here?" inquired the other, gravely.

"I don't know."

"And our passage money?"

"I don't know," he repeated doggedly.

"Surely you must have some idea?" urged Jervis, with a touch of asperity.

"Yes, you can write to the uncle for fresh supplies."

"No, I will not do that," returned the

uncle's heir, who was rapidly losing his patience.

"There is your own allowance, a most liberal one."

"I have not drawn it because I thought Uncle Dan's cheque covered everything."

"And it seems that you were too sanguine."

"What have you got in your cash-box, Waring?" he demanded sternly. "Do you mean to tell me seriously that you are quite penniless?"

"No, I've got a thousand rupees; that will pay the servants here, take me to Simla, and keep me there quietly, till events arrange themselves. I cannot pay my mess bill in Shirani — a whopping one! You see, I punished their champagne, and I was always asking guests."

A dead silence, broken only by the jingling bit of Jervis's impatient pony.

"Well, what do you propose to do to get me out of this hat? How are we both to get out of the country?" inquired Clarence,

whose effrontery was of a rare and peculiar character.

Jervis sat for some time with his hands in his pockets and a frown on his brow. At last he said—

"I suppose, if the worst comes to the worst, I must draw out six hundred pounds, though I think it's a mean encroachment on the old man's generosity. One hundred will keep me here till we start, and the remaining five will pay mess bill, rent, passage money, and so on. I shall tell the Brandes the truth the first time I see them, and that will be to-morrow morning."

"Then, by George! if you do," cried Clarence in a harsh, discordant voice, "you need not trouble about *my* passage home, for as sure as you open your lips"—tugging furiously at the table-drawer as he spoke—"and expose me as a wretched impostor, a paid companion, and a beggar—do you see this revolver?" suddenly producing one as he spoke—"I swear I'll put it to my head and blow my brains out! Here!" he con-

tinued, snatching up Mark's little Prayer-book and kissing it vehemently, "I swear it on the book!"

Then he pushed away both book and weapon, and, resting his elbows on the table, contemplated his *vis-à-vis* with a grey, drawn, haggard face—a face expressing such anxiety and desperation, that it was difficult to believe that it was the countenance of good-looking, popular, *débonnaire* Captain Waring.

"I don't want to drive you to anything," said Mark, who was also deadly pale; "but if I keep my lips sealed and continue to feel a mean, double-faced hound, I must have *my* stipulation also. It is not for the sake of any extra consideration or popularity I might gain that I wish to speak—you believe *that?* But you know I am deliberately playing a double part, and sailing under false colours. It all seemed so easy and harmless at first, from sending off the valet and baggage and——"

"All that sort of thing, as Sir Gloster

would say," interrupted Clarence, with a ribald laugh.

"But now it has grown from small beginnings, it leads on from one deception to another. I am almost afraid to open my mouth; I never dare to allude to hunting or yachting, or anything that sounds like money, or even to speak of my uncle or my home, for fear people may think that I am lying."

"You never wanted to make these *confidences* when you were in Columbo or Calcutta," sneered Clarence. "You have been exciting some one's interest, eh? And pray, what is your stipulation?"

"That I may tell the whole truth to one person."

"As a dead, dead secret. I don't mind if you do—as long as it is not a woman."

"But it is a woman," said Jervis, quickly.

"Ah, I need not ask her name—Miss Gordon," exclaimed Waring, with a peculiar grating emphasis. "Now, there's a girl I

don't like—nasty, snubby way with her, and the most haughty smile I ever beheld."

"Her ways and her smiles are not likely to concern you much, I fancy; but she is the girl I wish to marry, if I can prevail upon her to accept me."

"*Prevail!* And you doubt if you would prevail without telling her of the *coin?*" cried Clarence derisively.

"She is the last person in the world to care for money; in fact, it is a disadvantage in her eyes, as I happen to know."

"The young woman must be indeed a *rara avis!*" observed Clarence, with an insolent laugh.

"But," pursued the other, "if I ask her to accept me, I should like her to know all about me."

"Pollitt's pearl barley, and all! You don't think that will go against the *grain* —see? Eh? Not bad!"

"I wish you could be serious for five moments," exclaimed Jervis, angrily, "and let me finish what I am saying. I am not

the least ashamed of Pollitt's pearl barley—nor would I begin by having a secret from her."

"Whatever you might come to later, eh? And Uncle Dan—have you thought of him? Is he to be let into the news about the young lady, or will you *begin* by having a secret from him?"

"Of course I shall tell him at once."

"Oh! very proper indeed! Well now, I suppose we have talked over everything, and at any rate I have talked myself into first-class thirst! You are to keep five hundred pounds to settle up with in case of accidents, and you are to continue to hold your tongue, and keep up your present *rôle* with every one but a certain young lady—that's about it?"

"Yes, I suppose that's about it," acquiesced Mark, rising and taking his cap.

As Captain Waring watched him hurrying towards his waiting pony, mounting and galloping away up the compound, he

said to himself as he deliberately struck a fusee—

"Well, Clarence Waring, I think you got considerably the best of *that* bargain! You have the brains; and if you had money and opportunity, you could do great things!" Nevertheless, he took up the revolver, and looked at it with a sober face ere he returned it to the table-drawer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"SWEET PRIMROSE IS COMING!"

CAPTAIN WARING had gone down the hill, gallantly escorting Mrs. Atherton and Miss Potter, and followed by an innumerable retinue of servants, ponies, and baggage.

He left a blank behind him—also an unpaid mess bill. His square shoulders, broad smile, and loud voice were missed in the club, verandah, and elsewhere.

He was coming back to settle up his bills, he declared, "and he left his cousin in pawn," he added with a hearty laugh.

"Sara," said her husband, coming in from his dressing-room, lathering his face —he was always clean-shaven, and looked

twenty-five at a distance—"Waring is off. That young Jervis is all by himself; he has a broken wrist, and can't play polo or tennis. Why on earth don't you have him up here?"

"'Ark at the man!" appealing to Ben, who squatted beside her, helping her to dispose of her buttered toast. Mrs. Brande was seated at a little table in her own room, clad in a gorgeous dressing-gown, and partaking of chotah hazree. "Haven't I asked him till I am tired? I've written to him, and gone to his house, and it's all no use."

"Well, I'll see what I can do," rejoined her lord and master. "That is to say—I must admit that women are sharper in these ways than we are—if you think it's all right, and there is no chance of his making a fool of himself with Honor? No fear of his falling in love, eh?" And as he calmly awaited her reply, he resumed operations with the shaving-brush.

"In love with Honor! Ha! ha! that

is a good idea! If he is in love with any one it's with *me*—so don't say I did not put you on your guard! Honor, bless your dear simple old heart! why, they see precious little of one another, thanks to you, who always carry him off to tennis or to talk; and when they are together, as well as I can make out, they are fighting most of the time!"

"There's nothing like beginning with a little aversion, so people say," remarked Mr. Brande.

"Diversion! There won't be much for him here, poor boy, with his lame arm. Do you remember, long, long ago, a Major Jervis of the Bengal Cavalry—a splendid-looking man, especially in full dress and his turban; a widower—he married again? This boy has a great resemblance to him. I wonder if he is any relation."

"Merely his father—I asked him the first time I saw him! Jervis was A1 at rackets. I knew him rather well. He married a second time, a woman with tons of money

in indigo and house property. The granddaughter of a Begum, she had a pair of eyes like hot coals, and led him a life to correspond."

"And what has become of him?"

"The boy is rather reserved, as you know, so I did not like to ask him, but as *I* have not heard of him for a good many years, I conclude that he is dead; indeed, I am nearly certain of it."

"And the Begum's lacs have not done much for the son? I hope you will get him to come here; take *no* refusal—it must be miserable work moping alone. All the same, I shall be huffed with him if he comes for *you*, after saying no to *me*."

"Sara, you are a truly consistent woman!"

"And you are a truly fearful object to behold, with your face all over white; no wonder Ben is staring at you. There is the post peon—it must be late."

Mr. Brande's invitation proved irresistible, and the very next day saw Mark Jervis

duly installed at Rookwood. The move occasioned no comment—his wrist was broken and he wanted looking after: the Brandes' bungalow had ever been a sort of auxiliary station hospital. The young invalid soon made himself at home, and was certainly no trouble to any one, as his hostess frankly informed him. He was interested in the fowls and pigeons; he seemed knowing about ponies; he looked on admiringly whilst Honor filled the flower-glasses, and gave his candid opinion and advice; he played Halma with Mrs. Brande, and Patience with Honor—and acted as umpire at tennis.

"Here is quite a pack of letters," said Mrs. Brande, coming into the verandah one morning, and critically examining them as she spoke. "One for you, Honor, one for me, and two for Mr. Jervis—'300, Prince's Gate,' on the envelope"—handing it to him. "Is that the new style?"

"I really don't know"—receiving his

uncle's epistle, and sitting down on the steps beside Ben.

Mr. Brande had a pile of officials for his share, and soon every one was plunged in their own correspondence.

"Uncle Pel," said his niece, looking up from a crossed and scratchy letter, "here is a long epistle from Mrs. Kerry, our rector's wife. She is going to hold a drawing-room meeting about missions, and she wishes me to tell her," reading aloud, "what I think of the prospect of Christianity in this dark heathen land? I know nothing about the matter; what is your opinion?"

"That is rather a tall order, a big question"—sitting erect, sticking his eye-glass in his eye and focussing his niece. "I am sure I can tell you very little. India is many years behind the age—it is populous and isolated. The old creeds, however, are gradually being sapped. I dare say in a hundred years India will be Christian, and"—dropping his glass suddenly—"Britons may be Buddhists."

"Oh, Uncle Pelham, do talk seriously for once; you know I could not write that home. Mrs. Kerry," again referring to her letter, "asks particularly about the Hindoos!"

"Well, you can inform her that the Hindoos are naturally a devout people, and must have a religion. Some are now theists, atheists, agnostics; some mere coarse idolaters, who even in these days have devil-worship and witch-burning—yes, within a hundred miles of a college whose students devour Max Müller, and Matthew Arnold, and the most advanced literature of the day."

"And Mahomedans?"

"Mahomedans never change, and never will change, until, having read history and science, they see themselves from another point of view. You can assure your friend that they, too, have their missionaries, who adopt street preaching and tract distribution, and that they may be found in countless bazaars, expounding the teach-

ing of the Prophet. They make many converts, and among them some Christians! Pray tell the lady *that*."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, Uncle Pelham."

"Among the Hindoos, whose caste is so firm, the social conditions of the lower orders is so wretched and unchangeable, that numbers become Mahomedans, where all are alike, where severe asceticism is not necessary, and there are no outcasts, but scope for the indulgence of any ambition. There is your aunt's old ayah; she does not know *what* she is. She attends Hindoo and Mahomedan feasts impartially. She believes alike in Vishnu and Mahomed; she also believes in whisky schrab!"

"My dear Pel, how can you say such a thing!" broke in his wife, indignantly. "Don't be stuffing the child's head with such dry rubbish, but just look at *this*." And Mrs. Brande, who had risen, solemnly walked over and held out a photograph of a girl, and said, "Look here, P.;

never mind your missionary talk, but tell me what you think of *that?* Who do you think she is?"

"An angel to look at, at any rate," was the emphatic reply.

"Yes, did you ever see so perfect a face? Well, she is your own niece — Fairy Gordon?"

Yes, it was indeed Fairy—an exquisite picture of her: soft, *posée*, touched up, showing the best side of Fairy's face—with Fairy's best expression.

"My dear," said Mrs. Brande, turning to Honor, "I would not exchange you for anybody, but *she* is the beauty of the family, and no two words about it. Eh, P.?"

"Beautiful indeed," he assented; "but I prefer Honor's bright little phiz and big inquiring eyes."

He was a judge of countenance, and even a flattering photograph could not deceive him; there was a cruel pinched expression about the beauty's lips.

"Come and look at this, Mr. Jervis," cried the proud aunt. "Is she not lovely?"

"Yes . . . lovely," he responded. She was undoubtedly "the pretty one," though he secretly agreed with Mr. Brande.

"I wonder what Mrs. Langrishe would say to her—eh? Eh, Honor?"

What indeed! Honor flushed violently and smiled constrainedly, but made no reply.

"And here is her nice little letter," continued Mrs. Brande, dropping it into Honor's lap. "I must send her something, poor child."

The missive was written over two sheets, in an enormous hand—a hand that would have befitted a giantess—and ran as follows:—

"Dear Aunt Sara,

"I seem to know you so well from Honor's letters, that I would like you to know a little about *me*, and I send you

my photograph. It is considered very like me, only my hair and complexion—which Honor will tell you are my two *strong* points—do not come out. We devour her letters every week, and are quite familiar with Shirani, and the people there, and the flowers and the exquisite scenery, and your dear kind self. I envy Honor her delightful home—sometimes I cry when I think of it (and you will suppose that I am very foolish) — with balls, and parties, and picnics, and a pony of her own. Her life is a contrast to that of her poor little sister Fairy, who has no one to load her with kindness and gifts, and has not been to *one* dance since May, and who must make a pair of gloves last for months. However, I am not grumbling; Honor's pleasures are mine. I feel your great generosity to her, and am most grateful to you. When you have time, I hope you will send me your photograph—we have not one of you—and also a few lines to cheer up our long dull days. How I wish we could *afford* to go

away for a change! I dare say Honor has told you that at *first I* was the one who was to have gone out to you, but afterwards it was decided by the prudent ones of the family (Jessie and Honor) that I was to remain at home. Still I have always had a sort of feeling that I belonged to you, because for three whole days I was the chosen one, and could hardly eat or sleep, I was so happy. Excuse this rambling letter; I am not a bit *clever*, like the others, but I am ever

Your loving niece,

"FAIRY.

"P.S.—Is Honor engaged yet? She never mentions any admirers."

It was the epistle of a Cinderella, and yet all her life Fairy had been made the family queen. Honor's cheeks crimsoned with anger (her aunt imagined that it was the flush of shame or a guilty conscience) as she thought of the various little privations of her own and Jessie's life, that

Fairy might go softly; of the miles she had tramped, the shabby clothes she had worn for Fairy's sake. It was but the other day that she had sent her eight pounds out of her allowance, instead of spending it on that pink ball-dress. Now that she was absent, there was, as Mr. Kerry had bluntly indicated, a larger margin for luxuries at home; it was really too bad that Fairy should write out to simple Aunt Sara, in this martyr-like vein.

Honor looked vexed, as she raised her eyes and met her aunt's gaze—an inquiring gaze.

"And so the other child wanted to come?"—handing the letter from Honor to her husband. "And you never told me, you that are so free and open. Tell me now, since her mind was so set on it, *what* prevented her?"

"Aunt Sara, Fairy is not strong, not fit for long journeys or excursions, late hours, or a foreign climate. Our doctor said it would be madness for her to venture, and

that was one reason. She changed her mind of her own accord. She has always been the family pet."

"But you mention one reason. What was the *other?*"

Honor now became scarlet. "It was no harm—I would rather not say," she stammered; "you will know some day," and she looked desperately distressed.

"I wonder if she would come out *now?*" said Mrs. Brande, musingly. "We can put up two as easy as one. Eh, P.? The Hadfields expect Gerty in November. She might come with her, and get five or six months' fun after all. It will give her something to talk of in future, and unless I'm mistaken, *she* will give people something to talk about. Eh, P.?"

Mr. Brande was slowly perusing his niece's letter, but it did not appeal to him; it had a cringing fawning smack. Bright-eyed, impetuous Honor could never have penned such an epistle.

"There is a letter on the ground that

you have not seen, Mrs. Brande," said Mark Jervis, as he picked it up.

"So there is, I declare; it is from Mrs. Primrose. I'm sure she wants me to see about getting her house aired. She is rather late up this season." Mrs. Brande ran her eyes over the paper, and gave vent to an expression of genuine dismay.

"What is the matter?" inquired her husband quickly.

"She cannot get away for ten days, and she is afraid to keep the child down there any longer, the heat is so awful. She wants me to take her?"

"O Lord!" ejaculated Mr. Brande. "We would sooner take anything—short of small-pox. Wire at once—no room here—there are telegraph forms on my writing-table."

"Too late," groaned Mrs. Brande; "she has sent her off—'trusting,'" quoting the letter, "to my 'well-known kindness and good nature!' I'm a great deal *too* good natured, that's what I am," said Mrs.

Brande, with unusual irritation. "The child and ayah are actually at the station now, and will be here the day after to-morrow."

"Then I shall clear out, if I can possibly manage it," said her husband, emphatically.

"What is there about this child, Uncle Pel, that throws you and Aunt Sara into such a panic."

"Panic! I thank thee, niece, for teaching me that word! Yes; the very word—panic. Oh! I forgot you and Jervis here are new-comers, but most of the North-West have seen, or heard of, or suffered from 'Sweet Primrose.'"

"Sweet! What a name! A play on words, I suppose," said Honor.

"And a gross misfit," growled Mr. Brande.

"Pray give us a few more particulars, sir," urged Mark. "Prepare us—put us on our guard."

"She is six years of age—an only child —'*cela va sans dire*.' Extremely pretty, and graceful, and intelligent."

"Ah, I believe I shall like her," said the young man, with an appreciative nod. "I am prepared to be her champion. I'm rather fond of children—especially pretty little girls."

"She is as sharp as a surgical needle, active, greedy, restless, prying—with a marvellous memory for the conversations of her elders, and an extraordinary facility in relating them! The things that child has said, with the air of a little innocent saint; the secrets she has divulged to a whole room; the malapropos questions she has put——"

"Pelham!" interrupted his wife sternly, "if you are going to repeat any of them, please wait until Honor and I have left the verandah. The child is innocent enough," she explained to Mark, "but mischievous, and she delights in seeing her elders look miserable. Oh dear me! dear me! I wish the next ten days were over. Ben can't abide her, and no wonder—she dropped hot wax on his nose; and last time I had her

here, she tried on every one of my best caps and bonnets, and threw them all over the place. But that was not the worst. At breakfast, one morning, she heard Mr. Skinner telling some story of a horse he had bought, which turned out to be a screw, and she clapped her hands in great glee and screamed, 'I know what *that* is! I heard mother say that *you* were an awful screw.' I thought I should have had a fit, and Mr. Skinner has never put a foot inside this house from that day."

CHAPTER XXV.

SWEET PRIMROSE JUSTIFIES HER REPUTATION.

Two days after this conversation, Sweet Primrose was kicking her long legs in Rookwood verandah, as she lay flat on the matting, absorbed in a picture-book. A picture-book, no matter how quaint, novel, or voluminous, never lasted this young lady for more than five minutes—as Mrs. Brande well knew. She would toss it scornfully aside, and once more begin to wander to and fro with her wearisome little parrot cry of "Amuse me, amuse me!"

At present she was on her good behaviour. She had taken an immense fancy to Mark, and she was surprisingly polite to Honor; and as she was undoubtedly a most

lovely little creature, with delicate features, wistful violet eyes, and hair like spun silk, the young people were inclined to make much of her, and to believe that Mr. and Mrs. Brande were a prejudiced elderly pair, who did not know how to take the right way with children; and this particular child was disposed to favour them with a great deal of her society—and they enjoyed it.

She accompanied them about the garden, —generally walking between them, tightly holding their hands. She spent a considerable time every morning in Honor's room, fingering all her knickknacks, unfolding her handkerchiefs, upsetting pin-boxes, and watching with undisguised interest how Honor did her hair.

The result of the inspection being, that at breakfast she was in a position to announce to the company the following gratifying statement—

"*I* saw Honor doing her hair; it's long and real, like mine," with a conceited toss of her blonde locks—"down to here,"

indicating the length on her own small person. "She does not put on bits, like mamma. Mamma's fringe is all pinned on, with long pieces that fasten it at the side, like this," demonstrating their situation with tiny tell-tale fingers; "or like you," turning to Mrs. Brande. "*I* saw your plait!"

"Well, I hope you admired it!" rejoined the lady, with somewhat staggering *sang froid*. "It grew on my own head once."

And Sweet, finding that the topic was *not* a painful one, ceased to pursue it.

She was fond of sitting on Mark's knee, with her arm closely locked round his neck, her cheek pressed against his, looking at pictures or listening to stories. Indeed, he seemed (as Mrs. Brande remarked) to have hypnotized her. Ben still distrusted the child, so did Ben's grandpapa and grandmamma; but every one else appeared to think that Sweet Primrose was now quite a pattern — a reformed character. She went down to the band, exquisitely dressed,

in fluffed out petticoats and fine silk stockings, in charge of her fat, jewelled ayah; there she secretly administered pinches right and left to other children, and rudely criticized their clothes. She strolled into the ladies' room, ostensibly to look at the picture papers; and she was, among her elders, so quiet, so piano, such a dainty, flounced-out little mortal, that old acquaintances could hardly realize that *this* was their own original and most disagreeable "Sweet."

It was Mrs. Brande's birthday, and Mrs. Brande's birthday had not been forgotten by her friends. There were cards, letters, and little presents from some of the "boys," a lovely sachel from Honor (secretly manufactured as a surprise), bouquets, an exquisite silver lamp from Mark Jervis, which she remarked to Honor "must have cost the poor boy a frightful sum!"—last, not least, a silver photograph-frame, with "Ben's respects."

Mrs. Brande's face was radiant. She

went straight up to Mark with her presents in her hands.

"It was too bad of you to buy me such a grand present, and just what I was longing for—and Ben. *That* was your idea too! Do you know that I have a great mind to give you a kiss," she said threateningly.

Sweet, who was playing with her porridge, stiffened with expectation, and awaited further developments with a pair of enormous eyes.

But Mrs. Brande did not carry out her menace—no; she merely said—

"You are only a boy, and I'm an old lady. How old are you, by the way, eh? I must make a note of your birthday."

"I was twenty-six last April."

"Twenty-six! Why, you don't look it by five years," sitting down before the teapot and a pile of letters and little parcels which lay beside her plate.

"Pelham always gives me diamonds," she went on, "but I have plenty; and, in case you might suppose he had forgotten

me this time, he has given me a large cheque for the new Orphanage; so I have done splendidly."

"Did you get any chocolates?" asked Sweet, anxiously.

"No, my dear; but I'll buy a box for you after breakfast."

"And is this really your birthday?"

"Yes. Why? Doesn't it look like it?" triumphantly.

"I thought it was only ladies who had birthdays," remarked this charming little guest, with a severe air; "and Mrs. Dashwood says *you* are not a lady."

"Well, not by birth, my dear, though I dare say I am as well-born as she is; and, anyway, I take the *pas* of her in all society."

"Whose pa?" was the sternly put question.

As Mark and Honor greeted this query with a burst of laughter, the mite looked excessively pleased with herself.

"You will soon find her quite in her best form," muttered Mr. Brande from behind

the *Pioneer*. Then added, in French, "She has been pretty good for a week, and that's her very longest interval. I saw her down at the fowl-house before breakfast, Honor, with your smart white-silk parasol."

"Mamma always talks just as you do when she is talking about *me*, or about anything she does not want me to know," cried Sweet, vivaciously. "I've done my breakfast," slipping off her chair, "and I'm going down to see the syce's children. Oh, won't I pull their hair;" and she darted away.

Sweet was possessed of a demon of unrest that morning—nothing pleased her for more than two minutes, and her indolent ayah calmly left the task of entertaining her to others. Little Miss Primrose never played games, or dressed dolls, or made shops—indeed, Sweet's tastes were far too advanced for these tame juvenile delights; they had palled years previously. It afforded her far keener pleasure to harry

her elders, and to rule her fellow-housemates with a scourge.

She wandered aimlessly about, with her piteous shrill cry of, "Amuse me, amuse me! Oh, will *no one* amuse me!" She had tired of Honor's hats and new dresses, of chocolates, of Mark's stories; and her irritating and monotonous appeal had become as maddening as the constant slamming of a door.

"Look here, Sweet. I have a grand idea," said Mark at last. "Would you like me to draw your picture?"

"And colour it?" she asked judicially.

"Yes; and put in your blue sash, and all."

"And my necklace?"

"Certainly—your necklace too, if you please."

"Then do — do — do it this instant minute!"

"You must wait till I get my drawing things and paints; and you will have to sit quite, quite still for a whole hour. If you

cannot do that, there will only be an *ugly* picture! Do you understand? My easel and things are at Haddon Hall. I must send for them; so if you like to go and smarten yourself up, you can."

He had scarcely ceased to speak, ere the vain little creature strutted straight off to her own room, loudly calling for her ayah in imperious Hindostani.

Mrs. Brande could hardly believe her eyes when an hour later she came into the verandah, in some trepidation, to see what made Sweet so quiet, and discovered the "little blister," as she mentally called her, seated demurely on a chair, as rigid and motionless as a statue.

"See, I'm having my picture took," she chirped out. "But I must not move. Please look how far he has got," nodding towards Mark, who was painting away steadily, though rather embarrassed by the loss of the use of his left arm.

Mrs. Brande and Honor went over to examine the portrait, expecting to see a

feeble little outline, something done just for good nature, and to keep the child quiet. But they almost started, as their eyes fell on a roughly sketched-in head—the living, breathing face of Sweet, looking at them from the canvas, with her best—in short, her "angel" expression.

"Well, I never! Why—you are a regular artist!" gasped Mrs. Brande at last.

"A very irregular one," he answered with a laugh. "I have not painted a portrait for more than a year. Of course I have, like every one who comes up, and can hold a brush or pencil, attempted the snows! But my snows are simply like a row of blobs of cotton wool. I cannot do landscapes, though I am pretty good at faces and animals."

"I should rather think you *were*," said Mrs. Brande, emphatically.

"Is it pretty?" called out the model imperiously. "Is it pretty, like me?"

"Who said you were pretty?" demanded Mrs. Brande.

"Every one says, 'Oh, what a pretty little girl!'"

"It is much too nice for you, I can tell you that." To Mark, "It is wonderful. Why, you could make your fortune as a portrait painter!"

"So I have been told, perhaps because there is no chance of my ever putting the advice into practice. I can catch the likeness, and make the picture resemble my sitter, but I cannot finish. After a certain point, if I go on, I spoil the whole thing."

"Oh, please," whined a small voice in acute agony, "don't spoil *me!*"

"No need, you are quite spoiled enough," rejoined the artist with unusual emphasis.

"Why did you never let us know of this talent, Mark? What a pleasure to your friends," said Mrs. Brande, leaning heavily on his chair. "I wish you would make a little tiny sketch—of—Ben?"

"No sooner said than done. I must leave this to dry for to-day, so call up the next victim; I have another block ready.

Ben, old man, I am going to hand you down to posterity."

Ben did not make half as good a model as Sweet, probably because he had not one atom of personal vanity. Every now and then he disturbed his "pose" by dashing at some mocking little devil of a squirrel, who peeped through the trellis-work, and dared him to do his worst! He dared, and it invariably came to nothing.

How the morning had flown! When "P." appeared at two o'clock, his wife rushed at him with two pictures—a sketch of Sweet, and a half-worked-in outline of Ben, to the life.

"Ben is splendid!" he exclaimed, "the twinkle in his eye, the white spot on his lip, and his Sunday-go-to-meeting expression. Ah! and let me see—my 'Sweet,' her most angelic and butter-would-not-melt-in-my-mouth look! Beautiful child!" apostrophizing her. "I think I can manage to remember *you* without the assistance of a speaking likeness!"

"Uncle Ben, how can you be so horrid!" remonstrated Honor, taking him in to lunch.

Luncheon (tiffin) was an exceedingly merry meal. It is well that we cannot see into the future, for dinner was the most dismal repast that the present tenants had ever discussed under the red-tiled roof of Rookwood.

Mark Jervis had been ten days with the Brandes, and had never found an opportunity yet of opening his heart, or telling his secret to Miss Gordon. Now that he was under the same roof, his hopes fell low, and his courage ebbed. He believed that she would be extremely indignant when she heard the truth from his own lips, viz. that *he* was the millionaire! Moreover, "that diabolical child," as, alas! he had now begun to call her, never left them alone, or out of her sight for one second. He had become an ardent convert to Mr. and Mrs. Brande's views—though he kept his conversion strictly to himself!

That same afternoon he found that his opportunity was approaching. Sweet was engaged to a children's party, Mrs. Brande was pledged to attend a mothers' meeting. Mr. Brande, who was busy over some returns, said—

"Honor, you and Jervis go up the forest road and I will be after you in a quarter of an hour. No ponies, we will walk, and give ourselves a colour, and an appetite. You may as well take Ben, and give him a run among the monkeys."

Honor and her escort set out, he with his arm still in a sling, and they walked briskly along the wide sandy carriage-road that wound up and up, at a very gentle slope among the pines. It was a delicious, still afternoon; the aromatic smell of the woods had impregnated the thin hill air, and acted on their spirits like champagne.

"Our nephew," alluding to Ben, who was cantering gaily ahead, "seems to be enjoying himself," remarked Jervis.

"He does; this is his favourite road.

That was a happy thought about *his* present!"

"Yes," with a smile, "I'm glad Mrs. Brande was so pleased. Mrs. Sladen helped me with suggestions."

"Poor Mrs. Sladen. She says that only for you she would have been killed the day that Toby Joy sent you both down the khud—that you put out your arm and saved her, and you won't even allow her to say so."

"No, indeed; I certainly will not."

"Colonel Sladen has been winning, and I have great hopes that he may allow her to go home this season."

"I hope he will, with all my heart; if I were her, I would remain at home, for good."

"She has not seen her children for five years, and little things forget so soon."

"Not always," significantly. "Our little friend has a wonderful memory!"

"No, no; but ordinary children. Sweet is extraordinary. Colonel Sladen has won

ever so much money from Captain Waring, and if it pays her passage, for once gambling will have done *some* good. All the same, I wish he would do something better with his money. Uncle Pelham says it is such a frightful example to other young men."

"Yes; and he has no luck. He might just as well draw a cheque, and send it to the secretary to distribute among the members, for it is only a loss of time, and would amount to precisely the same thing in the end."

"Minus the delightful excitement of gambling, you forgot *that!* It seems too bad to squander money in that way—when there is such poverty and misery everywhere. Even a few pounds can do wonders, and change people's lives altogether. Sometimes it appears to me that money is in wrong hands—and its owners don't recognize their responsibilities."

"A great fortune *is* a great responsibility," remarked her companion gravely. "It is so hard to know when to give, and when

not to give. I think people with moderate incomes have much the best of it."

"It is a capital joke, if any one could but hear us—deploring the drawbacks of wealth, you and I—the two poor relations. At least I speak for myself," with a merry smile.

"And I must speak for *myself*. I have long wished to tell you something, Miss Gordon. I have rather shirked doing it, because I'm afraid you will be vexed; but——"

The sudden snapping of a twig on the edge of the bank overhanging the road caused him to glance up. There stood a large leopard, in the act of springing; like a flash it alighted just a yard behind them, and then bounded back with poor Ben in its mouth! It all was the work of two seconds.

"Oh, Ben—poor Ben!" shrieked Honor, frantically. "Let us save him; we must save him."

Jervis snatched the alpenstock from her

hand, and ran up the bank. Leopards are notorious cowards; the brute halted one instant, dropped his prey, and sprang lightly away among the undergrowth.

But, alas! poor Ben was stone dead; three minutes ago he had been full of life, now a bite in his throat had ended his happy existence; there he lay, with his eyes wide open, fixed in an expression of frozen horror. His death was on him almost ere he knew it; he was dead as he was carried off the road.

As he lay limp across Honor's lap, her tears trickled slowly, and dropped on his still warm body.

"Aunt Sara—who was to tell her? Oh, what an ending to her birthday! And she had often dreaded this end for Ben—almost as if it was a presentiment, and had always been so urgent to have him home by sundown. There was scarcely a house in Shirani that had not paid toll to the "lugger buggas," as the natives call them, who were specially keen about dogs—short-

haired dogs, and who hung about paths and cookhouses in their vicinity after dark. But this murder had been done in broad daylight, long ere it was even dusk.

"Come, Miss Gordon," said her escort, "you really must not take on like this; you have only known him three months, and——"

"Don't say he was only a dog!" she interrupted indignantly.

"Well then, I won't, and I feel most awfully cut up myself. Yes," in answer to her upward glance, "I am indeed. It is something to know that his end was instantaneous—he scarcely suffered at all."

"And how is this to be broken to them?"

"Mr. Brande is coming after us. I will go and tell him, if you will wait here. No, on second thoughts, that would never do to leave you alone, and that brute in the wood—not that I believe he would face a human being. Ah, here comes your uncle."

The tragedy was gradually broken to

Mrs. Brande, and deep was her grief when her little dead dog was brought in, and laid at her feet. All the native household mourned (whether sincerely, or from their servile instincts, who shall say?). The only one who did not mourn was Sweet, who candidly exclaimed, as she cut a happy caper—

"Nasty ugly dog! I am *so* glad he is dead!"

Fortunately Mrs. Brande did not hear her, or she would probably have sent her straight out of the house, to test the comforts of the dâk bungalow.

Poor Mrs. Brande had cried so much that she was not fit to be seen; she did not appear at dinner. Next morning Ben's unfinished sketch called forth another flood of tears, and she was not presentable all the forenoon.

Meanwhile Sweet posed for her portrait, and chattered incessantly. She had been to a large party, and no other little girl had worn gold bangles, or pink garters

with satin rosettes. So she had frankly assured her audience, Mark and Honor—the latter was surrounded by quite a stack of books, and intent on solving an acrostic in the *World*.

"The tea was pretty good," continued Sweet, affably. "I got nine crackers and a fan, and a little china doll quite naked; but the sweets were not Pelitis's, only bazaar-made, I am sure. Percy Holmes tried to kiss me, and I scratched his face, and he cried. Such a Molly! I shall always call him Baby Holmes!"

Thus she babbled on garrulously, with her infantile gossip. Suddenly she seemed struck by an important thought, and gravely asked, with a widening of her big violet eyes—

"What does detrimental mean—de-tri-men-tal?" pronouncing the word as if she had got it by heart.

"You had better ask Miss Gordon," replied Mark. "Miss Gordon, there is a dictionary at your hand."

"Oh, what *does* it matter?" exclaimed Honor, who was beginning to be rather distrustful of Sweet's seemingly artless questions.

"Find out, find out!" cried the imp, swinging her legs impatiently to and fro. "I want to know, and I am sitting very nicely—am I not?"

Mark made a sign to Miss Gordon to humour her, adding—

"I never saw such a small person for picking up big words."

"Here it is," said Honor, at length, "and much good may it do you!" reading out—"Detrimental—injurious, hurtful, prejudiced."

"That's what Mrs. Kane said *he* was," pointing a gleeful finger at the young man. "A shocking detrimental, and that Mrs. Brande was a fool to have him here."

"Sweet! How dare you repeat such things?" cried Honor, with blazing cheeks. "You know it is very wrong. What a naughty little girl you are!"

"But she *said* it," boldly persisted Sweet; "and she is grown up."

"She was joking, of course; grown people often joke."

"She said a great deal. She said that——"

"Hus-s-sh! We don't want to hear tales," breathlessly interrupted Honor.

"She said," screamed a piping triumphant voice, high above the hus-s-sh, "he was in love with *you!*"

"Now," cried Honor, her passion having risen beyond all control, as she surveyed the pert, self-complacent little model—she dared not look at Mark Jervis—"I told you not to repeat stories. I have told you that over and over again, and yet you delight in doing it because it annoys people—and you do it with impunity. No one has ever punished you—but—*I* shall punish you."

And before Mark guessed at what was about to happen, Miss Gordon—actively precipitate in her resentment—had snatched the picture from the easel before him, and torn it into four pieces!

"There!" she cried breathlessly, "you can get off that chair at once, Sweet. Mr. Jervis has done with you."

Sweet opened her great violet eyes, and gazed in incredulous amazement. Never had she been so served. She had always hitherto made people angry, uncomfortable, or shocked, and gone scathless, and had invariably enjoyed what is known in sporting circles as "a walk over."

Never had she seen such an angry young lady. How red her cheeks were—how brightly her eyes glittered. Then Sweet's gaze fastened on her own picture, her mouth opened wide, and gave vent to an ear-splitting yell, as she tumbled off her chair, like a canary off its perch, and lay on the verandah, kicking and screaming.

"After all," said Jervis, with an air of humble deprecation, "you need not have been so angry with the poor little beggar; she only spoke the truth." (That he was a detrimental, or that he was in love with her—which?)

Attracted by vociferous shrieks, Mr. and Mrs. Brande rushed upon the scene from opposite doors. The languid ayah also appeared, and raised up her sobbing charge, who now and then varied her sobs by a shrill squeal of fury.

"What is it?" cried Mr. Brande, eagerly appealing to Honor and Mark. "I thought you were putting her to torture—at *last!*"

"What is it, dearie? What is it? tell me!" pleaded Mrs. Brande. "Come to me, lovey, and tell me all about it, doatie. There now—there now," making dabs with her handkerchief at the child's eyes.

"That," suddenly stiffening herself in the ayah's arms, and pointing a trembling finger at the guilty party, "that pig girl, tore up my pretty, pretty picture, because —I told her Mrs. Kane said that Mark was in love with her—she *did* say it, at the tea to Mrs. King, and that beast of a girl has torn my picture—and I'll tell my mamma, I will—I will—and Mrs. Kane did say it—and Mrs. King said——"

"For Heaven's sake, take her away!" shouted Mr. Brande, excitedly.

Thereupon Sweet was promptly carried off, kicking desperately, and still shrieking out, "She did say it. She did—she did—she did!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RESULT OF PLAYING "HOME, SWEET HOME."

It may appear in a ludicrous light to most people, but it was, nevertheless, a solemn fact that Mrs. Brande fretted so dreadfully after her dog, that her medical adviser (Dr. Loyd) suggested to her husband: "A few days' change, just to get her mind off it! You frequently go for a week's trip among the hills—go now."

Such an excursion did not mean the wild, trackless jungle, but a country intersected by good roads and bridle-paths, dotted at reasonable intervals by comfortable rest-houses. Neither the sympathy of her friends, nor a neat little grave and head-

stone inscribed "Ben," had had the smallest effect in taking the keen edge off the bereaved lady's grief; and she would have nothing whatever to say to a sweet little pup which Mark had procured for her, but indignantly hustled it out to the Ayah's go-down. No, there was nothing for it but the prescribed expedition. Mrs. Sladen was to have been one of the party, but failed (as usual) to obtain leave from home. Mr. Jervis would gladly have joined them, but he dared not absent himself from Shirani, in case the expected summons might arrive whilst he was absent. The long marches would have afforded capital opportunities for *tête-à-têtes* with Miss Gordon—he would have told her *all* as he rode by her side; the only difficulty was, that he was now rather doubtful as to whether Miss Gordon would be interested in his confidences? Her indignation when Sweet had blurted out the most sacred secret of his soul had opened his eyes, and when he had ventured to add that the child had spoken the *truth*,

Miss Gordon had simply withered him. Yes, Waring was right when he had spoken of her haughty eyes. Her anger had eventually passed over like a short thunderstorm, and she had meekly apologized for her outbreak, but without the smallest or faintest reference to his remark—as possibly being beneath notice.

"You have seen me in a rage before," she had declared—"not that *that* is any excuse for me, but rather the reverse. Of course I had no business to touch your drawing, and I am exceedingly sorry that I gave way to such a mad impulse. I wanted to give that wretched child a lesson, and I caught at the first weapon that I thought would punish her. I don't often behave in such a shameful and unladylike way, I do assure you."

And he assured himself that he might keep his real identity and his fine prospects locked for ever in his breast as far as she was concerned. The two days occupied in preparing for the march he spent in

finishing Ben's portrait. He held himself a good deal aloof; he seemed silent and out of spirits; and Mrs. Brande confided to her husband that she was sure his wrist was hurting him—he had been making too free with it, and she gave him many instructions on the subject ere they parted, he to return to Haddon Hall, and she to lead the way out of the station. He was to go up every day and have a look at Rookwood, cast his eye over the poultry and ponies, and see that the ferns were properly watered; in other words, Mr. Jervis was left as caretaker in charge—a token of unexampled confidence.

What a long time it seemed since he had come to Shirani! he thought, as he trotted up the cart-road, after having put his friends well on their journey. The chances were that his father would never send for him—still, he would remain at his post until October, and then go home. He would not be sorry to see Uncle Dan once more, to tell him yarns, and to unpack his

collection of presents, to look round the clubs, and hear all that had been going on during the season, and to try his young hunters out cubbing.

Yes; it was all very well to have modest ideas, but the pinch of poverty was another affair, and he and poverty were gradually establishing quite a bowing acquaintance. He was dunned for joint bills—unpleasant joint bills—small accounts, that made him feel small to think that they had been unpaid; shoeing bills, gram bills, gymkana subscriptions, wood and charcoal, and even milk bills. He would find it a tight fit to pay off old scores and leave sufficient money for their passage. He saw his own private funds shrinking daily; nevertheless, he was resolved not to apply to his uncle for money, nor to exceed his draft of six hundred pounds. Why should his uncle pay for his short-sighted folly? he had told him to keep the money in his own name, and, neverthe less, he had given Clarence a free hand. But then, in his wildest moments, he had

never supposed that the purse that supplied Captain Waring's wants, wishes, weaknesses, must be practically bottomless. "What a fool I have been!" he said to himself. "I have lived like an anchorite, and Waring like a prince; he has squandered every penny of my money, and turns about and blames *me*—for—leading him into temptation!"

Mrs. Brande, in her comfortable Mussouri dandy, Mr. Brande and Honor riding in advance, wound along the steep sides of forests—over passes and down ravines—travelling all the time through exquisite scenery in the clear hill air, where everything looks fresh, and the outlines of the trees and mountains are sharply defined against a cloudless sky. They halted each night at a different bungalow, marching about fifteen miles a day, and arriving at their resting-place early in the afternoon. On the third day, they came to a small out-of-the-way forest hut, which contained but a verandah, and three rooms, and two of these were already occupied.

Such a state of affairs was unparalleled. The earlier arrivals were two engineers on survey, and a lady travelling alone. Mr. Brande looked excessively blank, he would have to rig up some kind of shelter in the verandah, for they had not brought tents, and whilst he was conferring with Nuddoo, Honor strolled away with her violin. She liked to play in solitary places—where all kinds of musical vagaries, and occasionally her own compositions, were unheard by mortal ears.

She climbed the long sloping hill at the back of the bungalow, and sitting down below a great clump of bamboos and elephant grass, began to play soft melancholy music, that seemed to have exquisite words.

She played away dreamily for quite three-quarters of an hour, now stopping to fill her eyes with the landscape—the rolling hills, the glitter of the sunset on a distant deep-set mountain tarn, the faint far-away line of the plains.

At length it was time to be going; one

star was out, and a thin silver moon had sailed into the sky. She played as a final "Home, Sweet Home," a tribute to Merry Meetings and its inmates. As the last note died away, her trained and sensitive ear caught a faint sound in the tall grass and jungle behind her. Was it the sound of a human sigh? She started and glanced round. Just in time to see a thin hand withdrawn and the grass quiver all over, as something — somebody — crept stealthily away. Every scrap of colour had sunk from Honor's face, as she stood gazing into the still gently waving grass. No; she had not the nerve to make a search. Common sense whispered, why should she?

The place was extremely lonely, isolated, silent; there was already, or was it imagination, a weird and ghostly look about the hills and woods. In another moment Miss Gordon, violinist and coward, was running down hill towards the smoke of the bungalow, as fast as her pretty feet could carry

her—and that was at a surprisingly rapid pace.

She arrived breathless, just as the lamps were being carried into their room; but, for a wonder, she kept her adventure to herself. It might have been all fancy—and she knew Uncle P.'s stolid way of taking things to pieces!

Uncle Pelham did not contemplate a night passed in an open verandah with much pleasure. He was somewhat subject to chills, and the keen mountain air had a searching effect on his rheumatic bones. Mrs. Brande had suggested his sending in a polite note to their fellow-travellers and asking for a share of their quarters.

"They can only say 'No,'" she urged encouragingly.

"I do not like to run the chance of their only saying 'No,'" was the somewhat tart answer.

"I am certain they will be only too glad to oblige a man in your *position*, P. What is a corner of a bed-room, after all? and I

have a notion that I have met one of them somewhere—the one with the pale face and the fishing-basket. It was down at Ŏrai. Don't you remember him, P.—a very stupid young man?"

"My dear, I'm afraid you must give me a more exact description. I know so many stupid young men," rejoined Mr. Brande in his dryest manner.

At this moment, Nuddoo, the superb, stalked in and said with a salaam—

"The Mem Sahib in other room, offers half room to our Miss Sahib."

"There you are, Honor!" cried her uncle gleefully: thinking of the certain cold he had so narrowly escaped.

"But who *is* the Mem Sahib?" inquired his wife, with her most authoritative air.

"One native lady—very rich," was the totally unexpected reply.

"Native!" echoed Mrs. Brande and Honor in a breath. Then Honor said, "Well, it is extremely kind of her, and you can say, Nuddoo, that if I am not putting

her to inconvenience, I accept with great pleasure."

"Honor!" gasped her aunt.

"Yes, Honor, you are a girl after my own heart," said her uncle; "hall-marked silver, and not electro-plate. I dare say most of the girls we know would have refused to share the chamber of a native lady!"

"I'm not a girl," burst out his wife, "and I would for one. She will be chewing betel nut or opium all night, mark my words; and the place will be choked up by her women, huddled on the floor, staring and whispering and eating cardamums and spices! Leave *all* your jewellery and your watch with me, my dear; and indeed, Pelham, it is not one girl in a hundred who would turn out to sleep with a begum in order to save your rheumatic old joints."

* * * * *

Honor retired at nine o'clock; Mrs. Brande taking leave of her almost as if she was going to execution. She entered the other room, which was at the back of the

bungalow, with great precaution, for she saw that her fellow-lodger was apparently asleep. Any way, she was in bed, and her head covered with a quilt. It was the usual white-washed apartment, with a pine ceiling, and contained nothing more than the usual cord matting, table, two chairs, and two beds. A lamp burnt dimly; there was not a sign of any member of the begum's retinue!

Honor hastened to undress and get into bed as noiselessly as possible. She was tired, she had been in the open air all day, and presently she fell sound, sound asleep. From this sleep, she was unexpectedly awoke by a light, and a feeling that some one was bending over her. In a second she realized that a stranger, a woman, was standing beside her bed, who stammered in a curiously deliberate whisper, "Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"Then," said the girl, instantly sitting up and rubbing her eyes, "you are English?"

It was one of her wildest shots. She had been dreaming of a begum, with rings in her nose; the woman beside her made no other reply than by bursting into loud hysterical tears, suddenly kneeling down beside the bed and burying her face in her hands.

"Oh, tell me," said the girl, laying an impulsive grasp on her heaving shoulder. "What is your trouble?"

"Great, great — trouble—such—as you have never dreamt of," gasped the figure. "I was sitting in the wood, and I heard you play. When you played an air I have not heard for more than thirty years, something in my heart melted. I felt that I *must* see you—for though I had never seen you face to face, I loved you! I asked you to share my room, that I might gaze at you secretly, and carry away the remembrance of your features in my heart—but," now raising her head and looking piteously at Honor, "you awoke and discovered me——"

She was an old woman, to Honor's

surprise—at least her hair was snow white, her eyes black, and keen as a falcon's. Her face was thin and haggard, her features were worn, but they were perfect in form and outline. This white-haired woman, kneeling beside Honor, and who was kissing her hands with hasty feverish kisses, must once have been extraordinarily handsome—nay, she was handsome *now*.

"I watched you asleep," she continued, speaking in a sort of husky whisper. "I have not looked on the face of an innocent English girl for thirty-five years. I was once like you. Your music softened my stony heart, and I felt that I must see you—ay, and perhaps speak to you, once—dear God, before I die!"

"But what is your trouble?" urged Honor, squeezing the thin hand which held hers. "What has happened—who are you?"

"Ay—who am I?—that is the question—a question that will never be answered. For its own works lieth every soul in pledge—my soul is pledged to silence.

You have heard," dropping her voice to a whisper that seemed to chill like an icy blast, "of—the—mutiny—ladies?"

"Yes, poor souls; and proud I am of my countrywomen."

"I doubt—if you would be proud of *me*. You speak of those who stood up—ay, as I have seen them—and offered themselves to the sword—those who were butchered and slaughtered like oxen. I speak of—of—of—*others*—how can I tell this child?—who were carried away and lost for ever—in native life. I," looking steadily into the girl's eyes, "I am one of those. Lost honour—lost life—lost soul! God help me!"

A dead silence, broken only by the angry sputtering of the lamp, and then she added, in a strange, harsh voice—

"Well, I am waiting for you to spit upon me!"

"Why should I?" murmured Honor, in a whisper.

"Listen! I will put out the light, and

sit here on the ground, and you shall learn my story."

In another second the room was in utter darkness. Darkness appeared to give the stranger confidence, for she raised her voice a key, and Honor could hear every syllable distinctly.

"Thirty-four years ago I was not more than your age, but I had been married a year. We were very happy, my husband and I. He was an officer—in no matter what corps. The mutiny broke out; but we never dreamt that it would touch *us*—oh no, not *our* station! That was the way with us all. One Sunday we were all at church—I remember well; we were in the middle of the Litany, praying to be delivered from 'battle, murder, and from sudden death,' when a great noise of shouting and firing began outside, and people rushed, too late, to close the doors, and some were cut down—ah, I see them now"—Honor felt her shudder—"and many others and myself escaped into the belfry, whilst our

husbands held the stairs. They kept the wretches at bay so long that they were out of patience, and after setting fire to the church, rushed off to the cantonments and the treasury; and then we all came down and found our carriages and ponies and syces just waiting (most of them), as usual, where we had left them. We got in and drove away at a gallop to a neighbouring rajah, to ask for his protection; but many of the men, including my husband, remained behind to try and collect some troops, and to save the arsenal and treasury. The rajah lived fifteen miles from our station—we knew him well—he came to all our sports and races. Fifty of us sought his protection, but he pretended he was afraid to shelter us, and he turned us all out the following day.

"We drove on—oh, such a melancholy cavalcade!—hoping to reach another station in safety; but, alas! ere we had gone five miles we met two native regiments who had mutinied—met them face to face. We were ordered out in turn, just as we drove

up; and, as each man or woman or child alighted, unarmed, and quite defenceless, they were shot or cut down. Oh, the road —I shall never forget it—that red, red road between two crops of sugar-cane! Miss Miller—how brave she looked! just like what one pictures a martyr—she quietly stepped out and took off her hat, and never uttered word or cry as she faced her horrible death.

"Mrs. Earl and her two little children, and poor young Clarke, who had been wounded in the church. I was among the last; I had fainted, and they thought I was dead, I believe, and threw me into a ditch. Presently I crawled out, and crept into the sugar-cane; but a sowar discovered me; he saw my white dress, and he came with a bloody, upraised tulwar; but something arrested his arm—my beauty, I suppose. I was the belle of the station—and he offered me my life, and I took it. Oh" —and she sobbed hysterically—"remember that I was but twenty! I had seen the

dead. Oh, *don't* think so hardly of me as I think of myself! He came at sundown and brought me a native woman's dark cloth to throw over my dress; and when the stars came out he swung me up on the crupper of his troop horse, and I rode behind him into Lucknow. In Lucknow we went afoot, to escape notice, and in a crowd I eluded him and, turning down a narrow lane, fled. I stood inside a doorway as he ran by, and I breathed freely; but, alas! an old man suddenly opened the postern door, stared hard at me—a Feringhee, on his very threshold—and drew me within. Of what avail to cry out! I was in a veritable den of lions.

"The old man kept me concealed, dressed me in native clothes, called me his kinswoman, and gave me to his son as a wife—a half-witted, feeble creature, who died, and I was left a widow—a native widow. Oh, I know native life! The fierce tyranny of the old women, of the old mother-in-law, their tongues, their spite, their pitiless

cruelty! How many vengeances were wreaked on *me!* In those days I was stupefied and half crazy. No, I had no feeling; I was in the midst of a strange people; those of my own land I never saw —no, not when Lucknow was captured. The very news of its fall took three years to reach my ears. I never once crossed that fatal postern. I was, as my kinsfolk believed—in my grave.

"My mother-in-law died at last, and then the old man, who had ever been my friend, relaxed. I had more liberty, my wits seemed to revive, I spoke Hindustani as a native. I went forth as a Mahommedan woman—veiled. Little did the bazaar folk guess that a Mem Sahib was among them; they believed that I was a Persian—Persian women are very fair—only one old woman and her daughter knew the truth. Now and then they smuggled me an English paper, or a book, or otherwise I must have forgotten my own tongue. I lived this life for fifteen years, and then my father-in-law,

Naim Khan, died. He had no near kin, and he was rich, and left me all his money.

"I came away with the two servants and an old man. I remembered Shirani, and I found a little hut in the hills where I live. These hills are to me heaven, as the plains were hell. Think—no, do *not* think—of the stifling life in a tiny courtyard in the densest city quarter, the putrid water, the flies, the atmosphere. I *ought* to have died long ago, but it is those who are good and beloved who die. Even death scorned me! I have a considerable income, and once a year I am obliged to appear, and draw it in person. I am returning from a short journey now, and this is the first time I have ever met a soul. This lonely little bungalow is generally quite empty."

"Where do you live?" asked Honor, eagerly.

"In these hills, miles away, I have my books, flowers, poultry, and the poor. I work among the lepers."

"Alone?"

"Yes, for ever alone; and my story is for *your* ears alone."

"And your own people?"

"Believe me dead; and so I am. Did I not die thirty-four years ago? Is there not a very handsome window to my memory in the church where we were first attacked? I saw a description of it in the paper—'the beloved wife of So-and-so, aged twenty years.' My husband is married."

"Married!" repeated the girl in a startled voice.

"Why not? His family is growing up—he has a son in the service; his eldest girl is twenty. She is called after his first wife. His first wife—poor young thing!—was killed in the Mutiny, massacred on the Bhogulpore road. Was it not sad?" she added, in a hard, emotionless voice.

"Very, very sad!" said Honor, in a totally different tone.

"I have no name, no people, no friend."

"You will let me be your friend?"—pressing her hand sympathetically.

"What is your name, my child?"

"Honor Gordon."

"Honor—a fine name! *You* would have laid down your life—I saw it in your eyes. Alas, I never was brave, I never could bear pain. Life was sweet—any life, not death; anything but a sharp, horrible, violent death! Oh, if death was but a painless sleeping out of life, how many of us would leave it!"

"And what is your name?" inquired the girl in her turn.

"Nussiband."

"But your *real* name? Will you not tell me?"

"I have forgotten it—almost. It shall never be known now—not even when I am dead. People know me as the Persian woman, who lives near Hawal Ghât."

"Let me do something for you. Oh, you will—you must!"

"What could you do, my dear?" she asked in a hopeless tone.

"You will allow me to write to you. Let me go too and see you. Permit me to brighten your life in some way."

"Impossible. It has done me good to have seen you. I have poured my story, once before I die, into the ear of a fellow-countrywoman. May you be ever happy and blessed. Give me some little token, not to remember you by, but to keep because it was yours."

"What can I give you?"—thinking with regret of her few trinkets that were elsewhere.

"A little cornelian ring, I noticed on your finger."

Honor pulled it off. She felt a long, fervent kiss pressed upon her hand. Then she said—

"You will give me leave to write to you and send you books? You must. I will take no refusal. But we can talk about that in the morning, can we not?"

There was no answer beyond another kiss upon her hand and a profound sigh.

In the very early dawn Honor awoke, and sat up and looked about her eagerly. The other charpoy was bare and empty. She jumped out of bed, and nearly upset her ayah, entering behind the door chick, with her early morning tea.

"Where is the other lady?" she asked excitedly.

"Oh, that Persian woman, she went when it was as yet dark. Behold her on her journey."

And she pointed to a narrow road at the other side of the valley, up which a dandy with bearers was rapidly passing out of sight.

* * * * *

After this experience, Honor felt that she had suddenly become years older. She looked unusually pale and grave as she joined the Brandes at breakfast.

"Well, dear, and how did you get on?" asked her aunt. "Did she smoke a huka all night?"

"No, auntie."

"Was she very dark and fat, and did she chew betel nut?"

"No"—rather shortly.

"And is that all you have to say?"—in a tone of keen disappointment.

"Good gracious, Sara!" exclaimed her husband, impatiently, "you don't suppose that they carried on any conversation, unless they talked in their sleep."

"And here are your bangles and things, dear," continued her aunt. "But I don't see your little cornelian ring anywhere! I really—it's not worth a penny—but I don't see it."

No—nor was she ever likely to see it again.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MRS. LANGRISHE PUTS HERSELF OUT TO TAKE SOMEBODY IN.

The little excursion into the interior lasted ten days. Mr. Brande was fond of thus throwing off the trammels of office and putting many miles of mountain and valley between himself and official letters, telegrams, and scarlet chuprasses, with their detestable tin boxes. He remained away until the last hour of his leave, enjoying leisurely marches, *al fresco* tiffins and teas in inviting spots, also friendly discussions with the sturdy Paharis or hill-folk. He returned to Shirani as much refreshed by the change as his good lady.

Tea was ready in the verandah when they reached home. Everything appeared in apple-pie order even to the mistress's keen eye, from the snowy-clad khitmatgars, the glossy dark-green ferns to the flouted pup, newly washed and be-ribboned, who was in attendance in the ayah's arms. In a short time Mrs. Sladen appeared to welcome the family. She was speedily followed by Mrs. Paul in a rickshaw and Miss Valpy on a smart chestnut pony.

"We have come to hear all your news," said the latter, as she helped herself to a nice little hot cake.

"News! Pray where should *we* get news?" demanded Mrs. Brande, whose spirits had evidently revived.

"Come, tell us what has been going on in Shirani."

"We are all on the *qui vive* for the bachelors' ball; heaps of people are coming to it," said Miss Valpy.

"Bachelors, *I hope?*" put in Mr. Brande, briskly.

"Yes; it is to be on the eighth."

"I hope that our dresses have arrived," said Honor, anxiously.

"I think I can relieve your mind," rejoined Mrs. Sladen; "there is a large new deal box in the back verandah that looks *very* like dresses. But poor Mrs. Curtice! The cart that was bringing up her boxes went over the broken bridge into the river-bed, and all her new frocks are in a state of pulp!"

"Who is Mrs. Curtice?" inquired Honor. "A new-comer?"

"Yes; an elderly youngerly bunchy person," responded Miss Valpy. "She reminds me exactly of an old Java sparrow! She would look the same, no matter what she wore."

Mr. Brande, the only gentleman present, put up his eye-glass and gazed at the young lady meditatively.

"Any more news?" continued his insatiable wife.

"They say that Captain Waring is

engaged to Miss Potter, up at Simla. Does that cause you a pang, Honor?"

"Yes, a pang for Miss Potter," she retorted. "I can't endure Captain Waring."

"Oh, why not? Most people are long-suffering with respect to him!"

"I hate a man who, when he talks to me, every now and then chucks me metaphorically under the chin."

Mr. Brande now gravely focussed his eye-glass upon his niece.

"I see what you mean, dear. I'm sure, from what I know of you, he never took a second liberty with you. Sir Gloster has come back."

Here Mrs. Brande showed signs of increased attention.

"He has got snow-blindness. He went to the glacier."

"Why, it seems only the other day that he went away," observed Mrs. Brande.

"Yes, just after the starvation picnic," supplemented Honor.

"Everything will be dated from that

now!" exclaimed her aunt, irritably. "And is he laid up in Shirani?"

"Yes; Mrs. Langrishe has taken him in to nurse."

"Mrs. Langrishe! She never did such a thing before in all her life," cried Mrs. Brande, "and besides, she has no room."

"Oh, she has contrived it; she has given him Major Langrishe's dressing-room, and sent him to the club."

"Well, I never!" gasped her listener.

"You see," continued Mrs. Paul, laughing at her hostess's face, "the force of your good example."

"Force of example! I call it the force of being a baronet. And have you seen anything of Mark Jervis?"

"Yes; he and some of the Scorpions. Captain Scrope and Mr. Rawson are laying out a paper-chase course. I am sure he will be here presently," added Mrs. Sladen. "He is on this ball committee, and extremely energetic. Here he is," as Jervis

and two officers cantered up to the verandah somewhat splashed.

"Welcome back," he said, dismounting. "No, no, thanks; I will not come in, at any rate further than the mat. We have been through bogs and rivers, and are in a filthy state."

"Never mind; it's only the verandah! Do come in," said Mrs. Brande, recklessly.

"But I mind very much; and besides," with a laugh, "nothing makes a fellow feel so cheap as dirty boots."

"I thought you were accustomed to feeling cheap," said Honor, with a playful allusion to his nickname.

"No," throwing the reins to his syce and mounting the steps, "I much prefer to be *dear*."

"Dear—at any price!" exclaimed Miss Valpy, who, instead of chatting with Captain Scrope, was giving her attention to Mr. Jervis.

"Dear at *any* price," emphatically.

"How did you enjoy the interior?" turning to Honor.

"It was delightful."

"Any adventures this time? Any buffaloes, Mrs. Brande?"

"No, thank goodness, for I have the same wretches of Jampannis."

"And you, Miss Gordon? Had you no adventures?"

Miss Gordon coloured vividly, and muttered an inaudible reply, as she deliberately put the tea-cosy over the sugar-bowl. He recalled this little incident long afterwards, and then read its meaning.

"Here is Scrope waiting for a cup of tea after his hard day," he said, suddenly turning the subject and slapping Captain Scrope on his solid shoulder. "Scrope is wasting to a shadow with work, work, work." He and Captain Scrope were enthusiastic fellow-artists and racket-players.

"Yes, it's a fact; it's nothing but schools and classes, and drill and drawing maps. The army is not what it was," remarked

Captain Scrope, a round-faced, portly individual with a merry countenance. "We have garrison classes, signalling classes, musketry classes; but the most odious class I have ever attended is the meat class! I never bargained for all this sort of thing when I came into the service——"

"What *did* you bargain for? What would you like? Do pray name it?" urged Miss Valpy.

"Well, since you ask me, a nice gentlemanly parade once a week, would, in *my* opinion, fulfil all requirements."

"How moderate!" she exclaimed sarcastically. "Has any one been to see poor Sir Gloster? It must be so dull for him sitting all day with his eyes bandaged."

"Yes, I looked in yesterday, he was quite cheery and chatty."

"Nonsense! What did he talk about?"

"Well—a—chiefly himself."

"Rather a dry topic," muttered Jervis, *sotto-voce*.

Captain Scrope laughed.

"He is by no means so dull as you suppose," he rejoined significantly.

"No; Miss Paske is a sympathetic little creature, and has a pleasant voice," observed Miss Valpy, with a satirical tightening of the lips. "By the way, with his chubby cheeks and bandaged eyes, did Sir Gloster not strike you as a grotesque copy of the god Cupid?"

"To quote the immortal Mrs. Gamp—I don't believe there was ever such a person. Do you, Jervis?"

"Mr. Jervis will not agree with you," rejoined Miss Valpy, scrutinizing him critically. What sincere eyes he had—eyes only for Honor Gordon—and there was a wonderful amount of dormant force in the curve of that well-formed chin and jaw.

"I am not a coarse heretic like Captain Scrope, but I cannot say that I have ever made his personal acquaintance."

"No!" exclaimed Miss Valpy, with a

slightly incredulous glance. "Then I do not think you will have *long* to wait."

Miss Valpy's sharp eyes and tongue were notorious all over Shirani. Jervis surveyed her with a look of cool polite scrutiny as he answered with a nonchalance impossible to convey—

"Possibly not—they say every thing comes to those who wait."

"And how is Sweet? our own choice particular Sweet?" inquired Mr. Brande, as he laid down his cup and addressed himself to Captain Scrope. "I am languishing for news of the little darling."

"The pretty child still endears herself to every one! All our special skeletons continue to be dragged out into the light of day. Her last feat was to ask Mrs. Turner where her second face was, as Mr. Glover said she had *two!* I wish some one would take your little darling home! Poor as I am, I would gladly contribute to her passage."

"Talking of sending home," said Mrs.

Paul, "our collection for that poor widow and her children is getting on famously; we have nearly two thousand rupees; I must say that Anglo-Indians are most liberal, they *never* turn a deaf ear to a deserving charity."

"It is probably because they are shamed into it by the noble example set them by the natives," remarked Mr. Brande. "A man out here will share his last chuppatty and his last pice with his kin—thanks to the fact that the well-to-do support all their needy relations; we have no poor rates."

"There is one mysteriously charitable person in Shirani," continued Mrs. Paul, "who has repeatedly sent Herbert fifty rupees in notes anonymously, we cannot guess who he is?"

"He? why should it not be *she?*" inquired Miss Valpy, combatively.

"The writing is in a man's hand, and the notes are stuffed in anyhow—they are extremely welcome, however—always come

when most wanted. It is some one who has been here since March."

"No, no, Mrs. Paul; you need not look at *me*," exclaimed Captain Scrope, with a deprecating gesture; "I am an object of charity myself."

"Have you no idea, have you formed no conjecture?" inquired Mr. Brande, judicially.

"I was thinking that perhaps Sir Gloster," she began.

"Oh!" broke in Miss Valpy, hastily, "I can assure you that he is quite above suspicion: the only thing about him that is *not* large—is his heart. It is much more likely to be one of the present company," and her smiling glance roved from Mr. Brande to Honor, from Honor to Mr. Rawson, from Mr. Rawson to Mr. Jervis.

His face was determinedly bent down, he was playing with "Jacko" (the friend of dead-and-gone Ben, who now honoured Rookwood with much of his society), and all she could scrutinize was a head of

brown hair and a neat parting. Presently the head was raised. She met his eyes point-blank. Yes, he looked undeniably embarrassed, not to say guilty, as he endeavoured to evade her searching gaze.

"The culprit is Mr. Jervis!" she proclaimed with an air of calm conviction.

At this announcement there was a shout of ribald laughter, even Mrs. Paul and Mrs. Sladen smiled. Jervis the impecunious, the unassuming, the unpaid travelling companion, why, he went by the name of "the poor relation!" Miss Valpy's shots generally hit some portion of her target, but this one was widely astray. And now conversation turned upon the ensuing ball. Decorations were eagerly discussed. Was the dancing-room to be done in pink, or would men wear mess jackets? Had bachelors any distinctive colours, or would the colours of the Shirani gymkana be suitable? Should they select the colours of the most popular bachelor—this was Mr. Brande's suggestion—or let each of

the fifty hosts do a small bit of the room to his own fancy? Above this babel of tongues Jervis's clear voice was heard saying—

"Take notice, Mr. Brande, that I am going to make a clean sweep of your sofas and armchairs. I have also made a note of your new standard lamp. We shall want a cheval glass——"

Mrs. Brande beamed. She liked people to borrow her belongings. She would have lent her boy Mark her best pink satin dress, and feather head-dress, if they would have been of the smallest use to him.

Presently the party broke up, the visitors going away, as usual, *en masse*.

Miss Valpy was helped on her pony by Mr. Jervis, and as he carefully arranged her foot in the stirrup and gave her the reins, he looked up and their eyes met.

"Thank you very much," was all she said to him. To herself, "Aha! my good young man, I know *two* of your secrets!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CLUB IS DECORATED.

The bachelors' ball was to be the dance of the season, and to be done in a style that would set all future competition at defiance, for young Jervis—who was quite a leading light on the committee—had developed unexpectedly magnificent ideas, and ordered things right and left as if the hosts were so many millionaires. Half the supper—at least anything delectable or rare, that could venture to undertake a journey—was to be despatched from Pelitis. It appeared to the flattered community that the Indian Empire was being ransacked from Calcutta to Bombay, in order to entertain them suitably. Groups

of coolies were toiling up with palms from the hot low country, a dozen paharis were seeking orchids among the hills, there would be game from the Terai, pâtés and French sweets from the city of palaces, and fish that had executed their last splash in the Bay of Bengal.

Dr. Loyd nodded his head over his newspaper in the club smoking-room, and remarked that "He supposed it was all as it should be, and truly *fin-de-siècle!*"

To which the Honble. P. Brande, from over the edge of the *Calcutta Journal*, made answer—

"Pooh! *Fin-de-siècle!* Which *siècle?* The Romans, we all know, got their oysters from Cornwall, their caviare from the Caspian, we are only copying them in our so-called modern Capua."

"Yes," responded Dr. Loyd, with a laugh, "you are right; our luxurious tastes are centuries old; but we have advanced in other ways. Science, for instance. There have been splendid discoveries."

"Most of them infringements of old Chinese and Egyptian patents."

"Do you mean to say that we have not advanced?" demanded the other, deliberately laying down his paper.

"Yes," admitted Mr. Brande; "we have telephones, sewing-machines, bicycles, telegrams; I doubt if they have made us happier than our forefathers. Women have advanced —that is certain. A century ago they were content to live in one place, and in a condition of torpid ignorance—they were satisfied that their *métier* was to sit at home, and cook and sew. Now, we have changed all *that*. I am reading an article by a woman," tapping the page, "which is amazingly brilliant, lucid, and daring."

"Oh, they are *daring* enough—fools rush in, you know."

"Meaning that we are angels! Thank you, Loyd," rejoined Mr. Brande, with his dry little laugh. "This article is quite in your own line. The subject is heredity, the burning question of the day and hour.

How pitiless it is, this heredity," he continued, removing his *pince-nez*, and sitting well back in his chair—"the only certain and unfailing legacy! Strange how a voice, a trick, a taste, the shape of a feature, or a finger, is handed down, as well as soul-corroding vices, bodily diseases and deformities. Even animals——"

"Yes, yes," impatiently, "you are going to tell me about the puppy who points as soon as his eyes are open. I know everything that has been said. Of course we see a great deal of one side of it in our profession."

"I wish that a taste for cooking had been handed down in my wife's family," cried Colonel Sladen, suddenly plunging headlong into the conversation. "I tell her that she will poison me yet, and just as effectually as if she were Lucrezia Borgia."

"I'm only surprised that she has not done it long ago," muttered a bystander.

"What's that you were saying about the

advance of women, eh, Brande? It's the greatest rot and nonsense, this scribbling and prosing about the equality of the sexes," blustered Colonel Sladen, squaring himself on the hearthrug. "Women must be kept in their proper places—their sphere is home, the nursery and kitchen."

Cries of "Oh! oh!" from several young men, drawn to the scene by a well-known blatant bass voice.

"Yes, I say" — encouraged by his audience—"that this growing independence should be nipped, and at once. Women are pushing themselves into our places—doctors, decorators, members of school boards, senior wranglers, journalists. I don't know *what* they will want next."

"Then I shall be happy to enlighten you," rejoined a clear treble voice from the doorway, and there stood Miss Valpy, in her most mannish coat, Tattersall waistcoat, and sailor hat, heading a crowd of other ladies. "Sorry to disturb you, gentlemen, but we *want* this room."

Colonel Sladen puffed and glared, for the moment positively speechless.

"Permit me to introduce the decorating committee for the ball," continued this bold young person. "The secretary has given the club over to us for two days. We have *carte blanche*, and no time to lose. Each apartment has its own allotted number of workers. This one represents our share," looking round with the complacent eye of a proprietor. "Of course it will have to be thoroughly fumigated and ventilated; but I dare say it won't make a bad tea-room."

"Do you mean to say that we are to turn out?" demanded Colonel Sladen, "and to give up our smoking-room for this tomfoolery?"

"There will be no tomfoolery about the *supper*," she retorted impressively. "I shall really be much obliged if you"—looking round and speaking authoritatively—"will all clear out."

"Then I suppose we must fall back on the

card-room," growled Colonel Sladen, not displeased at thus securing an early rubber.

"Oh, pray don't!" with a deprecatory gesture, "the card-room is already in hand; it is to be the ladies' cloak-room."

Colonel Sladen restrained himself with great difficulty as he asked, in a sort of choked voice—

"And pray what arrangements have been made for whist?"

"Oh, a tent will be good enough for the card-players!" was the contemptuous reply.

"I never heard of such management! *I* shan't come to this blessed ball!"

"Oh yes you will," returned Miss Valpy, serenely. She was already at work, collecting and piling up newspapers. "Think of the prawns and pomphret coming all the way from Bombay, and *how* disappointed they would be not to see you!"

"Ah, and the Agra beauty who is also expected—Miss Glossop; *she* will cut you all out! Ha, ha, ha!" retorted Colonel Sladen, with angry exultation.

"That's what people generally say of a girl they have never seen," rejoined Miss Valpy, coolly sweeping spills off the chimney-piece. "Now, *I* have seen her. There are twenty prettier faces in Shirani."

"Including the face of Miss Valpy!" with ferocious sarcasm.

"It is extremely kind of you to say so," making him a mocking curtsey, "and for once I am quite of your opinion."

Colonel Sladen could not find any appropriate retort beyond some inarticulate emotional noises.

"Fanny"—to her sister—"help Mrs. Glover and Mrs. Bell. Abdar"—to a servant—"take out all the chairs into the verandah, and send in the coolies to lift the table."

Thus the smoking-room was stormed, and its lawful tenants scattered abroad by bold, domineering, and unscrupulous women. It was true that every department had been told off; the senior ladies had

undertaken the supper-room. There were to be little tables for four—quite a novel departure; and on the day of the ball there was scarcely a small table left in any private house in Shirani—the bachelors had borrowed every one, as well as armchairs, rugs, and draperies. Rookwood was almost swept and garnished, in answer to the demands of Mrs. Brande's "boy" Mark. Mrs. Langrishe, careful soul, had declined to lend one single chair or candlestick. It would have established a precedent. She, however, was good enough to spare her niece, who demonstrated that she could work hard, and decorate, and arrange flowers, when she pleased, and was full of clever expedients. She and Toby Joy presided over the arrangements of the long verandahs, and divided them with screens, palms, and sofas, hung up lamps, flags, and draperies, and devised numbers of sitting-out nooks with curiously sympathetic details and elaborate care. Their merry bursts of laughter continually penetrated to the ball-

room, where a large party, by means of ladders, hammers, and nails, were festooning the walls with miles of bazaar muslin. Each department had its own special staff, and they embellished according to their collective taste, and in friendly rivalry with their neighbours.

One gang of workers visited another in order to offer their opinion and encouragement, and most of the young people enjoyed the decorations every whit as much as the grand result—the ball itself.

Honor, Mrs. Sladen, and half a dozen men and maidens were posted to the reception rooms and card-tent, and, strange to say, Honor and Mark Jervis shared the same hammer and bag of nails. Personal history has its epochs: brief seasons, during which life is fuller than usual. Never had the life of these two young people seemed so fruitful of pleasant events as at the present time!

Miss Valpy, the valiant leader of the forlorn hope which stormed the smoking-

room, was resting from her labours. Lunch for the workers was to be served in an *al fresco* fashion in the back verandah. Meanwhile she reposed in a coign of vantage, an interested and lynx-eyed spectator. She did not rest alone; her companion, Mr. Skeggs—the youth who considered a young man a reward in himself—lolled lazily beside her.

He was a little afraid of Miss Valpy, her sharp tongue occasionally penetrated the rhinoceros hide of his conceit. But somehow the other girls had not encouraged his assistance, which—to tell the truth—had chiefly consisted in dropping packets of tacks about the floor and lavishing uncomplimentary criticism.

"This ought to be a ripping ball," remarked the youth complacently. "Awfully well done. Some of them are working like niggers." And he grinned like a schoolboy.

"I am glad to see that you have a generous appreciation of *other* people's efforts," rejoined the young lady sternly.

"Ah, well, yes"—stroking his exceedingly faint moustache. "I say, I wonder who will be the belle to-night? Who do you think the prettiest girl in Shirani? I bar the married ladies."

"That *is* something very novel. Prettiest girl," she repeated speculatively. "Well, Miss Clover is the most strictly good-looking, her features the most correctly in drawing."

"Yes; only she always looks as if she was dressed up to sit or stand and be stared at, like a wax figure with a label, 'The public are requested not to touch.' You could not imagine her playing a hard set of tennis, or riding to hounds, or braving wet weather."

"No"—sarcastically—"I fancy she would 'come off' badly."

"Miss Paske is the most lively of the lot. She has such a piquante, wicked little face. On the whole I give her the preference. I like to talk and dance with her, but I funk a *tête-à-tête* or a long walk, for

she is just the sort of girl who would propose for a fellow like a shot."

"I am sure you need not be the least uneasy or afraid of putting temptation in her way," rejoined Miss Valpy. "*You* may enjoy her company with impunity. You would not suit her at all, as you are neither rich, good-looking, clever, or, indeed, distinguished for anything but an enormous amount of conceit; and the amusement it affords us is your *only* redeeming quality."

Mr. Skeggs again stroked his little moustache, blinked his white eyelashes fatuously, and giggled like a girl.

"Crushed—not to say squashed," he groaned.

"You admire Miss Paske," continued the young lady scornfully. "*Just* what I would have expected of you! Now, in my opinion, she is not to be named in the same hour with Honor Gordon. What lovely eyes she has!"

"Yes; Miss Gordon with her fiddle and

her figure is hard to beat. As to her eyes —I suppose they have never happened to scorch *you?* She is too stand-off; she is a woman's girl. To tell you the truth, she frightens me."

"Poor timid little soldier! No doubt you mean that she never flatters you; and I admit that her honest frankness sometimes takes away my breath. However, she does not terrify other men—for instance," and she paused expressively, "Mr. Jervis."

"No;" pursing up his mouth and raising his eyebrows. "I should not say he *shrank* from her. And who do you consider the best-looking man in Shirani, Miss Valpy? Your taste is so cultivated."

"Present company always excepted?" with a mocking glance out of the corner of her eye.

He nodded with a solemn acquiescence.

"Mr. Jervis, of course," was her promptly off-hand opinion.

"Oh, come—I say," expostulated the youth.

"Yes, I will say that he is extremely handsome; not in the big moustache, hooked-nose, bold brigand-style. He has a noble air; the shape of his head, the cast of his features, the expression of his eyes, embody my idea of a hero."

"A hero!" ejaculated her listener. "Great Scot! A pity he has no way of showing what stuff he is made of, beyond beating buffaloes away from old ladies."

"Yes, it is a pity. However, his opportunity may come *yet*. It is also a still greater pity that one can never praise one man to another."

"Well," nursing his knee meditatively, "I will admit that Jervis is passable, and looks clean bred——"

"Thank you, that is very kind of you. Does it not strike you that he is afflicted with an old-fashioned infirmity, and is decidedly shy?"

"Shy!" he almost shouted. "Jervis shy? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, he is with ladies."

"Oh, you may call it by whatever *name* you please. I call it fastidiousness. At any rate he is not shy with men. No fear! Only last night at the club some cad made a caddish remark, and it was not our hoary secretary who took it up and went for him, or any of the old chaps, but Jervis. By George, he gave him pepper. Went slap down his throat, spurs and all. A man's man you know, and popular. He can sing a good song, make a rattling good speech, and is as active as a cat; you should see him take a run, and jump standing on the billiard-room chimney-piece."

"What, Jervis? *My* Jervis?" in a tone of affected horror.

"Ahem! Well, I am not so sure of his being *your* Jervis," drawled Mr. Skeggs.

"No; and I am positively certain that he is not, in the sense you mean. I must confess that I should like to study him."

"Would you?" sarcastically. "You will not find him easy to classify or to fit into any of the usual pigeon-holes; he is a

fellow who has a singular gift of self-control —consumes his own smoke, you know."

"Why you have been unbending your great mind and studying him yourself! What do you make him out to be?"

"I make him out to be a curiosity—a mixture of an Arcadian shepherd, a London swell, and the rich young man in the Bible."

"You overwhelm me completely, especially by your last simile. Why the rich young man in the Bible?"

"Because he kept all the commandments."

"Oh!" drawing a long breath, "he must be as wonderful a rarity as the great auk. As for an Arcadian shepherd, I see what you mean. He has got what some one called an out-of-door mind. I have *not*. I should loathe Arcadia, and green swards, and beribboned crooks, and skipping lambs. To let you into a dead, dead secret, I can never see a lamb without thinking of *mint sauce!*"

"Shame! Shame!" exclaimed Mr. Skeggs, in tragic tones. "Well, Miss

Gordon," to Honor, who had approached their nook, "how are you getting on with that grand scheme of mirrors and draperies?"

"Very badly. It would have been finished long ago, only some unprincipled people from the ball-room made raids on me, and carried off both my hammers, all my pins, and two of my best Phoolcarries. What do you call that?" appealing for sympathy to Miss Valpy.

"I call it a beastly shame," said Toby Joy, who had joined her, speaking with much virtuous indignation—Toby, who himself had been one of the most audacious robbers.

"I call it, Honor among thieves," remarked Jervis, who happened to be passing by.

Miss Valpy looked after him attentively. No, that young man was by no means shy.

"I have made no end of beautiful kala-juggas," continued Toby, complacently;

"there ought to be half a dozen engagements to-night," and he nodded his head and rubbed his hands ecstatically.

"I thought kala-juggas were not allowed," retorted Miss Valpy, severely.

"Fine man traps," growled Colonel Sladen, who had just arrived to offer criticism and obtain lunch. "But girls don't go off as they used to do in my bachelor days. Girls," looking hard at Miss Valpy, "are a drug in the market."

"There is another view, that may not have occurred to you," she answered, snatching up the gauntlet thus flung in her face. "They are undoubtedly more *difficile* than when *you* were a young man. They may have heard the good old motto, 'Look before you leap!'"

Toby Joy sniggered audibly, and Colonel Sladen, turning savagely upon him, demanded, "what the devil he was laughing at?"

Toby, slightly cowed by the cantonment magistrate's beetling brows and fierce

demeanour, blandly answered with an impudent twinkle—

"I was only thinking of something I was told just now. Mrs. Tompkins' English-speaking Bearer announced to her to-day that the goose had four pups!"

There was a shout of laughter at this startling item of natural history; but Colonel Sladen was still unappeased, and would have pitilessly pressed home his question, but for Mr. Skeggs, who cried with great presence of mind—

"There is Jervis coming back; what is he saying? Ah!"—with a gesture of delight—"'Lunch—lunch—lunch.' Shows he is an alien, or it would have been 'Tiffin—tiffin—tiffin.'"

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Jervis, making a profound bow, "luncheon awaits you; and Mrs. Loyd requests me to announce that as you are here to work and not to play, you are only allowed twenty minutes for refreshments."

"Mrs. Loyd is as bad as an East End

sweater," grumbled Mr. Skeggs, handing Miss Valpy down from their mutual perch.

"You may tell Mrs. Loyd from me, that I won't work a second over the eight hours," cried Toby; and, offering his arm to Miss Paske, they waltzed across the ball-room, "just to try the floor."

"Pray observe," whispered Miss Valpy, as she and her escort seated themselves before a *recherché* cold luncheon, "how your man's man, Mr. Jervis, takes care to secure a place beside a woman's girl. Can you explain that?"

"No," seizing a pair of carvers as he spoke. "Just at present I prefer to explore the contents of this most interesting-looking raised pie."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARK JERVIS IS UNMASKED.

At nine o'clock—Indian balls are punctual and early—many lights were to be seen converging in all directions towards the club. The oldest inhabitant scarcely recognized it, it was so completely metamorphosed, and turned back to front and upside down. The general effect was dazzling—Persian carpets, rich draperies, Chinese lanterns, Japanese screens, great palms, abounded in the verandahs, and the ball-room was a blaze of candles, mirrors, and pink muslin. The reception rooms were blocked up by girls and men, busy with programmes and pencils.

Among the girls, no one was so closely

besieged as Honor Gordon. She was looking quite lovely, in a new white ball-dress, with a diamond star among her dark locks (Uncle Pelham's birthday gift). As for Mrs. Brande, in a black gown, no one had ever seen her attired to such advantage. She was both handsome and dignified in her velvet and diamonds, so different to her usual parti-coloured "reach-me-down" costumes. Honor had composed the costume, and it did her credit.

Dancing commenced with all the go and briskness of a hill ball. There were no lazy, lounging men in doorways, and but few wallflowers; moreover, there were a good many new faces, and not a few pretty new frocks. It was going to be a brilliant success.

"I have come to Shirani for six seasons," said Mrs. Brande to Mark (they were sitting out a dance), "and I ought to know the club well. But I give you my word I don't know which room I am in!" (A higher compliment was impossible.) "I

have never seen anything like this! Where did you get such grand ideas? and such extravagant notions, eh? for I may say that *you* have managed this ball."

Mark laughed rather constrainedly, and made no reply.

"So I hear your cousin is engaged to Miss Potter?" continued the lady.

"So I am told—but not by himself. I rather expected him here to-night."

"Money to money, of course," pursued the matron, discontentedly; "and poverty marries poverty. There is Honor—she is so afraid of what people may think, that she is barely civil to any one who has a penny beyond his pay. She is downright stand-off with Sir Gloster and Captain Waring. She will marry a pauper, of course, if she ever marries, and be poor and proud till she goes down to her grave!"

Mark's eyes followed Mrs. Brande's fond glance, and rested on a radiant vision with laughing eyes, who was endeavouring to

arrange a dispute between two partners. She did not give one the impression of being either poor or proud, at present.

Yes, the dance was going off splendidly. The new-comers had all been provided with partners; the refreshments were perfect; there was not too much salt in the ices, or sugar in the cup. The setting-out arrangements were greatly appreciated, and the excellent band was sober to a man.

One of the strangers had been waltzing with Honor Gordon; he was a brisk young fellow, who was going to be something some day, and was seeing the world as a preliminary step. He kept his eyes open, and carried a note-book, and had run up to Shirani in order to visit his brother, and gather statistics and local colour. As they came to a halt, he panted out rather breathlessly—

"So you have got that fellow Jervis here?" nodding to where he was standing, exactly opposite. "Jervis, the millionaire, as of course you know?"

"Oh no; it is his cousin, Captain Waring, who goes by that name."

"He certainly was giving that impression at Simla, and was about to be engaged to an heiress on the strength of it; but I put a stop to his game," said the little man, complacently.

"*You* did! And may I ask why?" regarding him with great astonishment.

"Why? Why should I not expose an impostor?"

"I think we must be at cross purposes, and speaking of different people," said the young lady, rather stiffly.

"I think not; but we can go into that later. Do not let us lose this capital waltz."

When they had taken two more turns round the room, they came to a halt, and he suddenly recommenced—

"Waring has not a penny to bless himself with. Nothing but debts. He left the Rutlands a ruined man, ruined by his own folly."

"And Mr. Jervis?"

"Is the rich young man," he rejoined impressively.

His companion's incredulity was so plainly depicted on her countenance, that he added—

"Yes, I am not joking. That good-looking young fellow over there, near the door, who is talking to the girl in pink. I came out with him on board ship last October. He and Waring were going to do a tour—Waring was a sort of companion, and genteel courier. I must say that the young fellow was shamefully mobbed by a lot of snobs, who believed him to be a second Count de Monte Christo. He is really the adopted son of a rich City man, called Pollitt—Pollitt's barley, you know," with an explanatory nod—"and he will probably have an immense fortune. He is naturally fond of a quiet life, and seemed to loathe all display or ostentation. Some of the women drove him to sit all day in the smoking-room.

They accompanied him fore and aft, and even down to the engine-room. For, you see, he is a good-looking, gentlemanly boy; none of the poultry grain about him, eh?"

Honor felt as if she was in a dream; her head was reeling. All her ideas about the position of the two cousins were thus suddenly reversed. The news was indeed a revelation, and extremely difficult to realize.

"I suppose you are *quite* in earnest," she faltered at last. "But do you know, that Captain Waring and Mr. Jervis were here together for weeks, and neither of them ever gave us a hint of your version of the story. It was Captain Waring who made plans, entertained, and lavished money—"

"Yes, he was always a first-class hand at that! He spent Jervis's money, I do assure you. Jervis lay low for the sake of a quiet life; he has no expensive tastes. But it was all a plant!"

"Then, if what you tell me is correct, I think *I* should call it a shameful hoax,"

said the young lady, inwardly writhing under the sting of many memories. "It was abominably deceitful of Mr. Jervis."

"Did he ever tell you or any one that he was a pauper?"

"No!" she admitted reluctantly. "I cannot say that he did; but he acted the part, which was all the same."

"Ah, my dear Miss Gordon, surely you have often heard that appearances are deceitful. Positively you seem quite annoyed to find that Jervis is a very rich man."

"I am," she rejoined with indescribable dignity.

"Your state of mind is deliciously unique! How would it have been, had he pretended to be rich, and turned out to be a beggar?" And he eyed her with irritating steadiness.

"He has taken us all in; it was too bad of him! And if he *is* so wealthy, what can have detained him at Shirani? He has been here more than two months, and seems to be a fixture. He came in

April, and has never left the station for a day. Every one thought it was because he could not afford to move about. What does it mean?" and she in her turn surveyed him with searching eyes.

"Ah!" with a laugh, "that riddle is quite beyond me; but I think, if you were to apply to some *young lady* in Shirani, she might answer the question. Let me suggest his present partner, the girl in pink?"

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